



25 10

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. F128

Shelf .47

Copyright - No. P27

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.





HOW NEW YORK CITY

IS

GOVERNED.

BY

JAMES PARTON.

[REPRINTED FROM THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.]



BOSTON:
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.
1866.

F128

47

P27

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1866, by
TICKNOR AND FIELDS,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

UNIVERSITY PRESS: WELCH, BIGELOW, & Co.,
CAMBRIDGE.

2.13-11

K.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

1. *Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York.* By D. T. VALENTINE. From 1841 to 1865. Prepared and published at the Expense of the City.
2. *Documents of the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York.* From No. 45 to No. 64. McSpedon and Baker. 1854.
3. *Annual Reports of the Comptroller, exhibiting the Receipts and Expenditures of the County Government.* The New York Printing Company. 1864 and 1865.
4. *Report of the Citizens' Association.* New York: George F. Nesbitt & Co. 1865.
5. *Wholesale Corruption. Sale of Situations in Fourth Ward Schools. Report of the Committee appointed by the Board of Education.* Published by the Citizens' Association of New York. 1866.
6. *One Job of the Conspirators who govern our City.* Published by the Citizens' Association of New York. 1866.
7. *Clean Streets for Three Hundred Thousand Dollars a Year.* By D. D. BADGER. Published by the Citizens' Association of New York. 1866.
8. *Work is King. A Word with Workingmen in Regard to their Interest in good City Government.* Published by the Citizens' Association of New York. 1866.
9. *Who pays for the Stealings? The Workingman!* Published by the Citizens' Association of New York. 1864.
10. *A few Questions for Workingmen to think of.* Published by the Citizens' Association of New York. 1865.
11. *Improved Dwellings for the Industrial Classes. A Plea for the Wives and Mothers.* Published by the Citizens' Association of New York. 1866.
12. *City Finances. Items of Expenditure for Stationery and*

Printing. Published by the Citizens' Association of New York. 1866.

13. *Items of Abuse in the Government of the City of New York.* Published by the Citizens' Association of New York. 1866.
14. *Report of the Executive Council to the Honorary Council of the Citizens' Association of New York.* 1866.
15. *Analysis of the proposed Tax Levy for the City and County of New York for the Year 1866.* Published by the Citizens' Association of New York.
16. *Important Reform Measures passed by the Legislature of 1866.* Published by the Citizens' Association of New York.
17. *An Appeal by the Citizens' Association of New York against the Abuses of the Local Government, to the Legislature of the State of New York, and to the Public.* 1866.
18. *Communication to the Commissioners of the Central Park.* By ANDREW H. GREEN, Comptroller of the Park. New York : Bryant & Co. 1866.
19. *Petition to the Market Committees of the Boards of Aldermen and Councilmen of the City of New York.* By THOMAS F. DE VOE, Butcher, No. 8 Jefferson Market. Published for the Author. 1855.

ON certain conditions, a very large proportion of the whole human race will steal. The opportunity must be good, of course, and the chance of detection small; the stealing must easily admit of being called by another name; and, above all, the theft must be of such a nature that the thief does not witness the pain which the loss of the stolen property occasions. On these conditions, almost all children and other immature persons, as well as a great number of average honest men and women, will steal. One proof of the civilizing power which the late Horace Mann exercised over the pupils of Antioch College in Ohio was, that no depredations were committed by those raw lads upon the orchards and gardens of the neighborhood. Mrs. Mann is justified in mentioning this fact as one that does honor to the memory of her husband; for the boy who steals apples from an orchard usually has an excellent opportunity and seldom has the slightest sense of doing an injury to the owner. He takes a handkerchief full from an unseen person, who has whole acres strewn with fruit and trees bending with the weight of it, and who will never know that particular loss. If the stolen property presented itself in its ultimate form, — a piece of bread and butter going into the mouth of one of the farmer's little children, — not one boy in ten thousand would steal a crumb of it; but so long as it is mere apples lying in an orchard, all boys will steal it without

compunction, unless they have been exceptionally well bred or taught.

Well-informed persons, who have been officially obliged to consider the matter, assure us that a majority of car-conductors, omnibus-drivers, and all other takers of unrecorded and untraceable money, are habitual thieves in all countries. It is the constant study of able managers to arrange a system that shall remove a temptation which experience has shown to be generally irresistible. Our fair readers, if we are so happy as to have any for so repulsive a subject, are acquainted with a class of active little mortals, — the cash-boys of our large dry-goods stores. Cash-boys had never appeared on earth if clerks had never stolen. But we need not multiply examples. The self-knowledge of the most honest men suffices. Who has not observed the unwillingness of persons of tried and punctilious integrity to put themselves in the way of temptation? It is because those know most of the moral weakness of men who have converted that weakness into strength. How often have we admired the exquisite modesty of Benjamin Franklin in that passage, written when he was an old man, in which he attributes the honesty of his early life to the fact that his trade brought him in such "plentiful supplies" of money that he had little temptation to do wrong. This was not a confession in the "high-toned" style, but that is the way honest men feel who know themselves.

We have undertaken to write something about the government of the city of New York, and yet we have fallen into a discourse upon stealing. The reason is, that, after having spent several weeks in investigating our subject, we find that we have been employed in nothing else but discovering in how many ways, and under what a variety of names and pretexts, immature and greedy men steal from that fruitful and ill-fenced orchard, the city treasury.

That the government of the city of New York has had, for several years past, an exceedingly bad name in the world, is probably known to all our readers. It has fallen into complete contempt. It is a dishonor to belong to it. Persons of good repute do not willingly associate with the rulers of the city, unless they are known to be of the small number who hold their offices for the purpose of frustrating iniquitous schemes. When it was found, last winter, that the Aldermen and Councilmen of the city must necessarily attend the ball of the Seventh Regiment at the Academy of Music, many respectable persons who had bought tickets sold them again, rather than jostle those magnates. The Rev. Henry Ward Beecher recently said, in the pulpit, that perhaps the govern-

ment of the city of New York did more moral harm to the people of New York than all the churches together did good. Nevertheless, since we are all disposed to exaggerate evils vaguely known, and since the cry of corruption is habitually raised by corrupt men for purposes of intimidation or revenge, we entered upon our task fully prepared to find the affairs of the city less corruptly administered than they are supposed to be. It is an old remark, that good people are not quite as good, nor bad people as bad, as popular rumor gives them out.

It occurred to us that perhaps the best way of beginning an investigation of the city government would be to go down to the City Hall and look at it. It proved not to be there. To keep the whole city from falling a prey to the monster, it has been gradually cut to pieces, and scattered over the island; but, like the reptiles whose severed fragments become each a perfect creature, with maw as spacious and appetite as keen as the original worm, so each portion of the divided system is now a self-operating and independent apparatus. In the City Hall, however, the legislature of the city still assembles. It consists of two honorable bodies, — the Board of Aldermen, seventeen in number, elected for two years, and the Board of Councilmen, twenty-four in number, elected for one year, — each member of both boards receiving a salary of two thousand dollars a year. Considering that they meet but twice a week, always in the afternoon, and that the session averages one hour's duration, these gentlemen cannot be said to be ill paid. They are compensated for their valuable services at twice the rate at which the labors of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States are rewarded. But then it costs those city legislators something to be elected. The legitimate expenses of an election to either of the boards amount to about three hundred dollars; but many a candidate expends a thousand dollars of his own money and several hundred dollars of other people's.

It is to the Chamber of the Board of Councilmen that we beg first to invite the courteous reader. This apartment being in the second story of the building, we pass many open doors on our way to it, through which we see idle men with their feet upon tables, smoking cigars. There are few buildings in the world, probably, wherein the consumption of tobacco in all its forms goes on more vigorously during business hours than the City Hall of New York. Smoke comes in clouds from many rooms, and the vessel which Mr. Thackeray used to call the "expectoratoon" is everywhere seen. If we enter the Councilmen's Chamber a few minutes before the time of beginning the session, we observe many members smoking; and as soon

as there is a prospect of an adjournment, the same gentlemen begin to fondle their cigars, to hand them about, or even toss them to one another, so that when the adjournment does take place not a moment may be lost. Twice we have seen a member light his cigar before an adjournment was carried. The very clerks of this "honorable body" write out their notes of the proceedings smoking cigars of a flavor beyond that which the pursuit of literature allows.

The Councilmen's Chamber, a lofty and spacious room, provided by the liberal forethought of honest and public-spirited men sixty years ago, is furnished with preposterous magnificence; *not* "regardless of expense," however, as some have inconsiderately alleged. On the contrary, expense was evidently the first object sought by the persons who had the work in charge; and, accordingly, wherever a thousand-dollar thing could be put, there you behold it. The apartment is arranged on the plan of the Representatives' Chamber in the Capitol at Washington. The President sits aloft, in a richly canopied recess; below him are four clerks in a row; the members sit in two semicircles, in chairs of the most massive mahogany, at desks of solid elegance. The windows are shaded by curtains heavy with expense, and the carpet is thick with it. In case the session, which begins at 2 P. M., should chance to prolong itself to the evening, there is a chandelier of the most elaborate and ramified description, such as would rejoice the heart of any contractor to furnish. To remind members, who all have gold watches, of the passage of time, there is a clock of vast size, splendid with gilt and carving. Four staring, full-length portraits of Fillmore, Clay, Young, and Hamilton Fish disfigure the walls, and the father of his country looks coldly down upon the scene in marble. *He* never had such furniture either at Mount Vernon or at Philadelphia, nor did he ever see such at Independence Hall. The ceiling is frescoed, and a great gilt eagle spreads his wings over the President's canopy. Besides this gorgeous apartment, the Councilmen have a large and handsomely furnished room for their clerks and books, and a private room, densely carpeted, for themselves, where there is a wardrobe for each member's overcoat and umbrella. These wardrobes are very properly provided with lock and key.

To assist this "honorable body" in the business of legislation, there is a "chief clerk," whose salary is \$3,000 a year; there is a "deputy clerk," at \$2,000 a year; there is a "first assistant clerk," at \$1,500 a year; there is a "second assistant clerk," at the same; there is a "general clerk," at \$1,200 a year; there is an "engrossing clerk," at \$1,250 a year; there

is a "sergeant-at-arms," at \$1,200 a year; there is a "reader," at the same; there is a "door-keeper," at \$750 a year; there is a "messenger," at \$1,200 a year; and there is an "assistant messenger," at \$1,100 a year. In short, there is not a legislative body in the world more completely provided with all external aids and appliances for the work in hand than the Honorable the Board of Councilmen of the City of New York. To the salaries of these officers the Councilmen add, in the form of gifts for "extra services," six or seven thousand dollars more, and they bestow upon the reporters of seventeen newspapers, for not reporting their proceedings, two hundred dollars a year each. Perhaps the clerks also are paid for not doing their duty, — if any duty can be found for so many, — for we were present in the chamber, last June, when a communication from the Mayor was read, in which he complained that bills came to him for approval so badly written that he could scarcely read them, and declaring that hereafter he would pay no attention to acts not properly engrossed.

The twenty-four Councilmen who have provided themselves with such ample assistance at such costly accommodation are mostly very young men, — the majority appear to be under thirty. Does the reader remember the pleasant description given by Mr. Hawthorne of the sprightly young bar-keeper who rainbows the glittering drink so dexterously from one tumbler to another? That sprightly young bar-keeper might stand as the type of the young men composing this board. There are respectable men in the body. There are six who have never knowingly cast an improper vote. There is one respectable physician, three lawyers, ten mechanics, and only four who acknowledge to be dealers in liquors. But there is a certain air about most of these young Councilmen which, in the eyes of a New-Yorker, stamps them as belonging to what has been styled of late years "our ruling class," — butcher-boys who have got into politics, bar-keepers who have taken a leading part in primary ward meetings, and young fellows who hang about engine-houses and billiard-rooms. A stranger would naturally expect to find in such a board men who have shown ability and acquired distinction in private business. We say, again, that there *are* honest and estimable men in the body; but we also assert, that there is not an individual in it who has attained any considerable rank in the vocation which he professes. If we were to print the list here, not a name would be generally recognized. Honest Christopher Pullman, for example, who leads the honest minority of six that vainly oppose every scheme of plunder, is a young man of twenty-seven, just beginning business as a cabinet-maker. Honest

William B. White, another of the six, is the manager of a printing-office. Honest Stephen Roberts is a sturdy smith, who has a shop near a wharf for repairing the iron-work of ships. Morris A. Tyng, another of the honest six, is a young lawyer getting into practice. We make no remark upon these facts, being only desirous to show the business standing of the men to whom the citizens of New York have confided the spending of sundry millions per annum. The majority of this board are about equal, in point of experience and ability, to the management of an oyster-stand in a market. Such expressions as "them laws," "sot the table," "71st regiment," and "them arguments is played out," may be heard on almost any Monday or Thursday afternoon, between two and three o'clock, in this sumptuous chamber.

But what most strikes and puzzles the stranger is the crowd of spectators outside the railing. It is the rogues' gallery come to life, with here and there an honest-looking laborer wearing the garments of his calling. We attended six sessions of this "honorable body," and on every occasion there was the same kind of crowd looking on, who sat the session out. Frequently we observed looks and words of recognition pass between the members and this curious audience; and, once, we saw a member gayly toss a paper of tobacco to one of them, who caught it with pleasing dexterity. We are unable to explain the regular presence of this great number of the unornamental portion of our fellow-beings, since we could never see any indications that any of the crowd had an *interest* in the proceedings. As the debates are never reported by any one of the seventeen reporters who are paid two hundred dollars a year for not doing it, and as the educated portion of the community never attend the sessions, this board sits, practically, with closed doors. Their schemes are both conceived and executed in secrecy, though the door is open to all who wish to enter. This is the more surprising, because almost every session of the board furnishes the material for a report, which an able and public-spirited journalist would gladly buy at the highest price paid for such work in any city.

Debates is a ludicrous word to apply to the proceedings of the Councilmen. Most of the business done by them is pushed through without the slightest discussion, and is of such a nature that members cannot be prepared to discuss it. The most reckless haste marks every part of the performance. A member proposes that certain lots be provided with curbstones; another, that a free drinking hydrant be placed on a certain corner five miles up town; and another, that certain blocks of a distant street be paved with Belgian pavement. Respecting

the utility of these works, members generally know nothing and can say nothing; nor are they proper objects of legislation. The resolutions are adopted, usually, without a word of explanation, and at a speed that must be seen to be appreciated. The first and last impression made upon a disinterested spectator is, that this most expensive body, even if every member were an honest man, would be absolutely useless. A competent street inspector, properly aided by the police, could do all the real work that is left to them to do; for such has been the flagrant abuse of their power, that, by degrees, they have been deprived by the State Legislature of a great part of the authority they once possessed; but the power to do mischief remains. This "honorable body" can still waste, give away, and steal the money of their constituents.

The only way in which we can convey to the reader's mind a lively idea of the character of the city legislature is to relate, as simply as possible, a few of their acts of last summer, which we witnessed ourselves and recorded on the day of their perpetration. There is no "mystery of iniquity" in the business; to understand the game which the majority of this body are playing, it is only necessary to sit out two or three of their ordinary sessions. We own it is a trial to the patience. There will be moments when a person of vivacious turn of mind will feel an almost irresistible impulse to throw something at the head of those insolent young bar-keepers, who have contrived to get their hands into the public pocket, and are scattering wide the hard-earned money of good citizens and faithful fathers of families.

At almost every session we witnessed scenes like the following. A member proposed to lease a certain building for a city court at two thousand dollars a year for ten years. Honest Christopher Pullman, a faithful and laborious public servant, objected on one or two grounds;—first, rents being unnaturally high, owing to several well-known and temporary causes, it would be unjust to the city to fix the rent at present rates for so long a period; secondly, he had been himself to see the building, had taken pains to inform himself as to its value, and was prepared to prove that twelve hundred dollars a year was a proper rent for it, even at the inflated rates. He made this statement with excellent brevity, moderation, and good temper, and concluded by moving that the term be two instead of ten years. A robust young man with a bull-neck and of ungrammatical habits said, in a tone expressive of impatient disdain, that the landlord of the building had "refused" fifteen hundred dollars a year for it. "Question!" "Question!" shouted half a dozen angry voices. The question was instantly put,

when a perfect war of *noes* voted down Mr. Pullman's amendment. Another hearty chorus of *ayes* consummated the iniquity. In all such affairs, the visitor notices a kind of ungovernable propensity to vote for spending money, and a prompt disgust at any obstacle raised or objection made. The bull-necked Councilman of uncertain grammar evidently felt that Mr. Pullman's modest interference on behalf of the tax-payer was a most gross impertinence. He felt himself an injured being, and his companions shared his indignation.

We proceed to another and better specimen. A resolution was introduced, appropriating four thousand dollars for the purpose of presenting stands of colors to five regiments of city militia, which were named, each stand to cost eight hundred dollars. Mr. Pullman, as usual, objected, and we beg the reader to mark his objections. He said that he was a member of the committee which had reported the resolution, but he had never heard of it till that moment; the scheme had been "sprung" upon him. The chairman of the committee replied to this, that, since the other regiments had had colors given them by the city, he did not suppose that any one could object to these remaining five receiving the same compliment, and therefore he had not thought it worth while to summon the gentleman. "Besides," said he, "it is a small matter anyhow";—by which he evidently meant to intimate that the objector was a very small person. To this last remark, a member replied, that he did not consider four thousand dollars so very small a matter. "Anyhow," he added, "we oughter save the city every dollar we kin." Mr. Pullman resumed. He stated that the Legislature of the State, several months before, had voted a stand of colors to each infantry regiment in the State; that the distribution of these colors had already begun; that the five regiments would soon receive them; and that, consequently, there was no need of their having the colors which it was now proposed to give them. A member roughly replied, that the colors voted by the State Legislature were mere painted banners, "of no account." Mr. Pullman denied this. "I am," said he, "captain in one of our city regiments. Two weeks ago we received our colors. I have seen, felt, examined, and marched under them; and I can testify that they are of great beauty, and excellent quality, made by Tiffany and Company, a firm of the first standing in the city." He proceeded to describe the colors as being made of the best silk, and decorated in the most elegant manner. He further objected to the price proposed to be given for the colors. He declared that, from his connection with the militia, he had become acquainted with the value of such articles, and he could procure colors of the

best kind ever used in the service for three hundred and seventy-five dollars. The price named in the resolution was, therefore, most excessive. Upon this, another member rose and said, in a peculiarly offensive manner, that it would be two years before Tiffany and Company had made all the colors, and some of the regiments would have to wait all that time. "The other regiments," said he, "have had colors presented by the city, and I don't see why we should show partiality." Whereupon Mr. Pullman informed the board that the city regiments would all be supplied in a few weeks; and, even if they did have to wait awhile, it was of no consequence, for they all had very good colors already. Honest Stephen Roberts then rose, and said that this was a subject with which he was not acquainted, but that if no one could refute what Mr. Pullman had said, he should be obliged to vote against the resolution.

Then there was a pause. The cry of "Question!" was heard. The ayes and noes were called. The resolution was carried by eighteen to five. The learned suppose that one half of this stolen four thousand dollars was expended upon the colors, and the other half divided among about forty persons. It is conjectured that each member of the Councilmen's Ring, which consists of thirteen, received about forty dollars for his vote on this occasion. This sum added to his pay, which is twenty dollars per session, made a tolerable afternoon's work.

Any one witnessing this scene would certainly have supposed that *now* the militia regiments of the city of New York were provided with colors. What was our surprise to hear, a few days after, a member gravely propose to appropriate eight hundred dollars for the purpose of presenting the Ninth Regiment of New York Infantry with a stand of colors. Mr. Pullman repeated his objections, and recounted anew the generosity of the State Legislature. The eighteen, without a word of reply, voted for the grant as before. It so chanced that, on our way up Broadway, an hour after, we met that very regiment marching down with its colors flying; and we observed that those colors were nearly new. Indeed, there is such a propensity in the public to present colors to popular regiments, that some of them have as many as five stands, of various degrees of splendor. There is nothing about which Councilmen need feel so little anxiety as a deficiency in the supply of regimental colors. When, at last, these extravagant banners voted by the Corporation are presented to the regiments, a new scene of plunder is exhibited. The officers of the favored regiment are invited to a room in the basement of the City Hall, where city officials assist them to consume

three hundred dollars' worth of champagne, sandwiches, and cold chicken, — paid for out of the city treasury, — while the privates of the regiment await the return of their officers in the unshaded portion of the adjacent park.

It is a favorite trick with these Councilmen, as of all politicians, to devise measures the passage of which will gratify large *bodies* of voters. This is one of the advantages proposed to be gained by the presentation of colors to regiments, and the same system is pursued with regard to churches and societies. At every one of the six sessions of the Councilmen which we attended, resolutions were introduced to give away the people's money to wealthy organizations. A church, for example, is assessed a thousand dollars for the construction of a sewer, which enhances the value of the church property by at least the amount of the assessment. Straightway a member from that neighborhood proposes to console the stricken church with a "donation" of a thousand dollars to enable it to pay the assessment; and as this is a proposition to vote money, it is carried as a matter of course. We select from our notes only one of these donating scenes. A member proposed to give two thousand dollars to a certain industrial school, — the favorite charity of the present time, to which all the benevolent most willingly subscribe. Vigilant Christopher Pullman reminded the board that it was now unlawful for the Corporation to vote money for any object not specified in the tax levy, as finally sanctioned by the Legislature. He read the section of the act which forbade it. He further showed, from a statement by the Comptroller, that there was no money left at their disposal for any *miscellaneous* objects, since the appropriation for "City contingencies" was exhausted. The only reply to his remarks was the instant passage of the resolution by eighteen to five. By what artifice the law is likely to be evaded in such cases, we may show further on. In all probability, the industrial school, in the course of the year, will receive a fraction of this money, perhaps even so large a fraction as one half. It may be that, ere now, some obliging person about the City Hall has offered to buy the claim for a thousand dollars, and take the risk of the hocus-pocus necessary for getting it, — which to *him* is no risk at all.

It was proposed, on another occasion, to raise the fees of the inspectors of weights and measures, who received fifty cents for inspecting a pair of platform scales, and smaller sums for scales and measures of less importance. Here was a subject upon which honest Stephen Roberts, whose shop is in a street where scales and measures abound, was entirely at home. He showed, in his sturdy and strenuous manner, that, at the rates then

established, an active man could make two hundred dollars a day. "Why," said he, "a man can inspect, and does inspect, fifty platform scales in an hour." The cry of "Question!" arose. The question was put, and the usual loud chorus of *ayes* followed.

As it requires a three-fourths vote to grant money, — i. e. eighteen members, — it is sometimes impossible for the Ring to get that number together. There is a mode of preventing the absence or the opposition of members from defeating favorite schemes. It is by way of "reconsideration." The time was, when a measure distinctly voted down by a lawful majority was dead; but by this expedient the voting down of a measure is only equivalent to its postponement to a more favorable occasion. The moment the chairman pronounces a resolution lost, the member who has it in charge moves a reconsideration; and, as a reconsideration only requires the vote of a majority, *this* is invariably carried. By a rule of the Board, a reconsideration carries a measure over to a future meeting, — to any future meeting which may afford a prospect to its passage. The member who is engineering it watches his chance, labors with faltering members out of doors, and, as often as he thinks he can carry it, calls it up again, until at last the requisite eighteen are obtained. It has frequently happened that a member has kept a measure in a state of reconsideration for months at a time, waiting for the happy moment to arrive. There was a robust young Councilman who had a benevolent project in charge, of paying nine hundred dollars for a hackney-coach and two horses which a drunken driver drove over the dock into the river one cold night last winter. There was some disagreement in the Ring on this measure, and the robust youth was compelled to move for many reconsiderations. So, also, it was long before the wires could be all arranged to admit of the appointment of a "messenger" to the City Librarian, who has perhaps less to do than any man in New York who is paid eighteen hundred dollars a year; but perseverance meets its reward. We hear that this messenger is now smoking in the City Hall at a salary of fifteen hundred dollars.

There is a manœuvre also for preventing the attendance of obnoxious, obstructive members, like the honest six, which is ingenious and effective. A "special meeting" is called. The law declares that notice of a special meeting must be left at the residence *or* the place of business of every member. Mr. Roberts's residence and Mr. Roberts's place of business are eight miles apart, and he leaves his home for the day before nine in the morning. If Mr. Roberts's presence at a special

meeting at 2 P. M. is desired, the notice is left at his shop in the morning. If it is not desired, the notice is sent to his house in Harlem, after he has left it. Mr. Pullman, cabinet-maker, leaves his shop at noon, goes home to dinner, and returns soon after one. If his presence at the special meeting at 2 P. M. is desired, the notice is left at his house the evening before, or at his shop in the morning. If his presence is not desired, the notice is left at his shop a few minutes after twelve, or at his house a few minutes past one. In either case, he receives the notice too late to reach the City Hall in time. We were present in the Councilmen's Chamber when Mr. Pullman stated this *inconvenience*, assuming that it was accidental, and offered an amendment to the rule, requiring notice to be left five hours before the time named for the meeting. Mr. Roberts also gave his experience in the matter of notices, and both gentlemen spoke with perfect moderation and good temper. We wish we could convey to our readers an idea of the brutal insolence with which Mr. Pullman, on this occasion, was snubbed and defrauded by a young bar-keeper who chanced to be in the chair. But this would be impossible without relating the scene at very great length. The amendment proposed was voted down with that peculiar roar of *noes* which is always heard in that chamber when some honest man attempts to put an obstacle in the way of the free plunder of his fellow-citizens.

These half-fledged legislators are acquainted with the device known by the name of the "previous question." We witnessed a striking proof of this. One of the most audacious and insolent of the Ring introduced a resolution, vaguely worded, the object of which was to annul an old paving contract that would not pay at the present cost of labor and materials, and to authorize a new contract at higher rates. Before the clerk had finished reading the resolution, honest Stephen Roberts sprang to his feet, and, unrolling a remonstrance with several yards of signatures appended to it, stood, with his eye upon the chairman, ready to present it the moment the reading was concluded. This remonstrance, be it observed, was signed by a majority of the property-owners interested, — the men who would be assessed to pay for one half of the proposed pavement. Fancy the impetuous Roberts with the document held aloft, the yards of signatures streaming down to his feet and flowing far under his desk, awaiting the time when it would be in order for him to cry out, "Mr. President." The reading ceased. Two voices were heard, shouting, "Mr. President." It was not to Mr. Roberts that an impartial chairman could assign the floor. The member who introduced the resolution

was the one who "caught the speaker's eye," and that member, forewarned of Mr. Roberts's intention, moved the previous question. It was in vain that Mr. Roberts shouted, "Mr. President." It was in vain that he fluttered and rattled his streaming ribbon of blotted paper. The President could not hear a word of any kind until a vote had been taken upon the question whether the main question should be now put. That question was carried in the affirmative by a chorus of *ayes*, so exactly timed that it was like the voice of one man. Then the main question *was* put, and it was carried by another emphatic and simultaneous shout.

We have spoken of the headlong precipitation with which all business is done in this board. Measures involving an expenditure of millions, and designed to bind the city for a great number of years, are hurried through both boards in less time than *paterfamilias* expends in buying his Sunday dinner in the market; and, frequently, such measures are so mysteriously worded that no one outside of the Ring can understand their real object. We happened to be present when a resolution was brought directly from the Board of Aldermen (who had passed it without debate), directing the Street Commissioner to make a contract with the lowest bidder for lighting the whole island for twenty years with gas, — the price to be fixed *now*, when coal and labor are twice their usual price. No such simple words, however, as *twenty years* were to be found in the resolution; which merely said, that the contract should be for "the same number of years as the contract last made and executed with the Manhattan Gas Company." A member, bewildered by the furiously rapid reading of this long and vague resolution, timidly inquired how many years that was. No one seemed to know. After a pause, some one said that he believed it was ten years. Whereupon, Councilman White, a faithful and intelligent member of the honest minority, proposed that the term of the contract be two years, which Mr. Pullman supported. The amendment was instantly voted down, and the original resolution was carried by the usual eighteen votes. The Mayor promptly vetoed the scheme. The *Tribune* thundered against it; but the veto message had no sooner been read, than it was passed over the veto by the Aldermen; then taken to the Councilmen's Chamber, where the requisite eighteen votes were immediately cast for it. This resolution, as we were afterwards informed, was merely one of a long series of measures designed to tap the lamp-posts of the city, like so many sugar-maples, and make them run gold into the troughs of a few notorious politicians.

We are lingering too long in the Councilmen's Chamber, and must abruptly leave it. Nor can we remain more than a moment with the Aldermen. It is not necessary, for there is not a pin to choose between the two bodies. We observe in their chamber the same lavishness of furniture and decoration; pictures as numerous and as bad as those which hang in the chamber opposite; the same wild profusion of clerks, assistant-clerks, readers, engrossers, messengers, and assistant-messengers; the same crowd of unwashed and ugly spectators outside the railing. Except that the Aldermen are a little older and somewhat better dressed than the Councilmen, we could discern no difference between them. Whatever dubious scheme is hurried through one body is rushed through the other. Sometimes the Councilmen point the game, and the Aldermen bring it down; and sometimes it is the Aldermen that start up the covey, and the Councilmen that fire. As with the Councilmen, so with the Aldermen, there is a sure three-fourths vote for every scheme which has the sanction of the interior circle who control the entire politics of the city. And, as among the Councilmen, so among the Aldermen there are a few honest and public-spirited men who vainly protest against iniquity, or silently cast their votes against it. If one such body is one too many, how shall we express the enormous superfluity of two? It is impossible.

But there is a third legislative board sitting in the City Hall. The island upon which New York is built is a county, and that county has its board of twelve Supervisors, who have the spending of seventeen millions of dollars per annum. The city and the county cover the same territory. Each creature in the island of Manhattan lives both in the county and in the city of New York. The existence, therefore, of a separate legislature for each is a complete absurdity; and, if both were honest, there would be constant danger of clashing between them. They do not often clash, because both have in view the same object, and pursue that object under the direction of a central gang, — the masters of both. It is the Board of Supervisors who, being authorized, eight years ago, to build a court-house at an expense not to exceed two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, have expended upon it two millions and a half; and there it stands to-day just half done. It is computed, by architects professionally employed, that for every dollar spent upon this unfinished edifice another dollar has gone elsewhere.

Our principal object in this article is not to present the reader with a startling catalogue of iniquities, but to endeavor to contribute our little towards discovering a mode of expelling the thieves, keeping them expelled, and getting a few honest men

in the place of that great multitude of plunderers. Before entering upon that part of our subject, however, we must show to readers remote from the scene, that the corruption exists, that it taints nearly every branch of the public service, that it is an evil of gigantic and menacing proportions, and that the numerous expedients devised for holding it in check have failed. Hitherto we have related what we have ourselves seen and heard: we now proceed to glean a few of the more striking facts from our notes of what others have told us and from printed testimony.

The volume the title of which may be found at the head of this article, "*The Manual of the Common Council*," is itself a curious specimen of the artifices resorted to by these official plunderers of the public purse. In the year 1841, a zealous assistant clerk to the Common Council conceived the idea of publishing a little volume, which should be a kind of city almanac; containing, besides what an almanac usually presents, a list of all the persons connected with the city government, their places of business and residence, and a map of the city. A neat, small volume of 180 pages was the result of his labors. Even this was unnecessary, because the most useful part of the information which it gave respecting the members of the government had already appeared in the *City Directory*, and an almanac could be had of pill-venders for nothing. No good reason could be given why even so inexpensive a work as that should be paid for out of the public treasury. But see to what proportions this trifling imposition has since grown. The next year, our zealous assistant clerk added to his catalogue of city officials a list of all previous members of the Corporation, from the earliest period of the city's existence, and a picture of New York as it was two hundred years ago. This year the volume swelled from 180 to 253 pages. The picture was interesting, and caused the work to be much spoken of and sought after, which was only another proof how unnecessary it was that it should be published at the expense of the city. The next issue, besides the list of names and residences, contained extensive extracts from ancient city records, which increased the number of pages to 312. Every year the *Manual* increased in bulk, in the quantity of superfluous matter, in the number and costliness of the pictures, until it has now become a manual of folly, extravagance, and dishonesty. Let us glance at the *Manual* for 1865; for, to add to the exquisiteness of the art employed in its preparation, the book is not published until the year is nearly expired, and a new set of officers are about to be chosen, so that the volume for 1866 had not appeared when these lines were written. The *Manual* for 1865 is a

most superb and lavishly illustrated duodecimo volume of 879 pages. It contains one hundred and forty-one pictures, of all degrees of expensiveness, — steel-plate, woodcut, plain lithograph, and colored lithograph. The large colored map of the city, at the beginning, cost as much money as a map of that kind could any way be made to cost. Next comes a steel portrait of the person who, for twenty-five years, has hired people to compile the annual volume, and whose name has always appeared on the title-page as its editor, and who is supposed to be liberally remunerated for his editorial labors. Next appears a very elegant colored title-page, containing six finely executed pictures.

Before proceeding with the list, we remind the reader that the ingenuity of the compilers of this work has been severely taxed for many years to devise and discover subjects for illustration. Subjects that could be called legitimate, or that approached the legitimate, having been long ago exhausted, the editor this year appears to have been in the direst straits to supply his lithographers and engravers with the regular quantity of work.

Accordingly, the next illustration is a plan of the Aldermen's Chamber, designed to show where each member sat in 1865; and the next is a four-paged, folding lithograph, containing — O precious gift to posterity! — a fac-simile of each Alderman's signature. In the next two plates posterity is blessed with the signatures of the Councilmen for 1865, and the means of ascertaining the precise arm-chair occupied by each. The following are the subjects of a few of the costly colored lithographs: — the "fur store" established in 1820 by the father of the Mayor of the city in 1865; the "old frame-house" in which the editor of the Manual "passed his youth"; "Mr. Stewart's house in Fifty-fourth Street"; "a grocery and tea store" of the year 1826; the house in North Moore Street in which Speaker Colfax was born; "twin frame-houses in Lexington Avenue"; Tammany Hall in 1830; a billiard saloon in the Fifth Avenue; Harlem Lane, with fast horses travelling thereon; the "Audubon Estate" on the Hudson; the upper end of the Central Park drive. Besides these, there are pictures, not colored, of a prodigious number of public and private buildings, and portraits of undistinguished persons. The number of pages occupied by extracts from old records, newspapers, and memories is 423!

Such is the book which the tax-payers of the city are called upon every year to pay for, in order to swell the income of sundry printers, lithographers, politicians, and the compiler. But this is not all. The number of copies annually ordered to

be printed is ten thousand ! The number paid for is ten thousand. The number actually printed, we are positively assured by men who are in a position to know, is about three thousand. Of this number, about fifteen hundred are distributed gratis about the City Hall, and the rest are sold by, and for the benefit of, the compiler. A considerable number find their way into the second-hand bookstores which make Nassau Street so fascinating to poor students and rich collectors. We bought our copy there, and its price was three dollars. The bookseller informed us that he laid in his supply of the Manual for 1865 at two dollars per copy, which is three dollars and thirty-six cents less than a copy costs the city. Nor have we yet got to the bottom of this enormous "job." We have said that the city pays for ten thousand copies of the preposterous volume. It pays for nearly twice that number. The items of the Manual account rendered for 1865 were these:—

Bill of engraving	\$ 4,353.10
Bill of engraving and printing	733.00
Bill of drawing and printing	5,150.00
Bill of lithographing and printing	3,185.00
Bill of printing 10,000 copies	27,951.20
Bill of corrections and alterations	300.00
Bill of paper for title-pages	600.00
Bill of thirty reams tissue paper	150.00
Bill of papering 10,000 copies	100.00
Bill of ten reams wrapping paper	150.00
Bill of binding 5,000 copies in cloth	5,000.00
Bill of binding 4,000 copies in muslin	4,000.00
Bill of binding 1,000 copies in morocco	2,000.00
<hr/>	
Total	\$ 53,672.30
D. T. Valentine, for compiling	3,500.00
<hr/>	
Total	\$ 57,172.30

This shameful account being brought to the notice of the present Mayor of the city, Mr. John T. Hoffman, he did himself the honor to veto the resolution authorizing a similar expenditure for 1866. He told the men who passed that resolution, that he had made inquiries of such publishing houses as the Appletons and the Harpers, and had ascertained that ten thousand copies of the work could be manufactured for \$ 30,000, instead of \$ 53,672 ; although a new publisher would not have the benefit of the large amount of stereotyped matter which appears in the Manual from year to year, with little alteration. The truth is, that the book actually costs the compiler about \$ 15,000 per annum ; and the difference between

that sum and the amount charged is taken from the pockets of the New York tax-payers by a process which we leave our readers to characterize with the proper term.

The most usual manner of stealing is to receive money for awarding or procuring contracts, appointments, donations, or increase of salaries, which money, of course, the favored person gets back, if he can, from the public treasury; and he usually can. The President of the Board of Health, last spring, when New York was threatened with the cholera, had occasion to remonstrate with a person who held the contract for removing dead animals from the streets, and threatened him with the breaking of the contract if its conditions were not better complied with. "That would be rather hard, Mr. Schultz," replied the man, "for that contract cost me \$60,000." And well it might; for the city pays \$25,000 a year for getting rid of a commodity every pound of which ought to yield the city a revenue. A dead horse, worth twenty dollars, the city pays for having carted off to where it can be conveniently converted into twenty dollars. Another contractor receives \$21,000 a year for removing night-soil, which could be sold for enough to pay the cost of its removal. By various extra charges, the holders of this contract have continued to swell their gains incredibly. Mr. Jackson Schultz, the energetic and capable President of the Board of Health, has recently published his conviction, that the "total swindle under this contract is a \$111,000," and we have had the advantage of hearing him demonstrate the fact. The story, however, is too long for our very limited space.

Does any one need evidence that the men who award such contracts, in the teeth of opposition and elucidation, receive a large share of the plunder? The fact is as certain as though ten witnesses swore to having seen the money to them in hand paid. Three years ago a contract was awarded for sweeping the streets for ten years, at \$495,000 a year. Since the accession to power of the new Board of Health, responsible men have handed in a written offer to buy the remainder of the contract for a quarter of a million dollars, i. e. to clean the city for seven years at \$495,000 a year, and give the city a quarter of a million dollars for the privilege. There are those about the city offices who know, or think they know, how the plunder of this contract is divided. We believe we are not violating any confidence, expressed or implied, when we say, that it is the conviction of the Board of Health that \$100,000 per annum of the proceeds of this contract are divided among certain politicians; that a certain lawyer, who engineered the project, and stands ready to defend it, receives a salary of

\$ 25,000 per annum as "counsel to the contract"; and that the men in whose name the contract is held are "dummies," who get \$ 6,000 a year for the use of their names and for their labor in superintending the work. The contract is further burdened with the support of several hundred cripples, old men, and idle men, all of whom are voters, who are put in the street-cleaning force by Aldermen and Councilmen who want their votes and the votes of their relatives, thus kindly relieved of maintaining aged grandfathers, lame uncles, and lazy good-for-nothings. These statements, we are aware, cannot be proved. Such compacts are not trusted to paper; and a witness driven to bay can always balk his assailants by refusing to criminate himself. The reader, therefore, may decline to believe these details. One thing remains, and is certain, that the working-men of New York are annually plundered of two hundred thousand dollars per annum by this single contract.

How the work so munificently paid for is *done* is sufficiently well known. Into that foul subject we cannot enter, except to notice the blind devotion of the great mass of poor men who annually vote to keep in power the people who steal their earnings and poison their children. New York boasts a *Democratic* majority of more than thirty thousand votes, and the government of the city is always in the hands of the party so named. Is it, then, the rich men's streets that are unswept, and the poor men's crowded avenues and lanes that are clean? Are the small parks and squares where thousands of poor children play better kept than those to which scores of rich men's children are carried? Is the Bowery cleaner than Broadway, and Tomkins Square more inviting than Union? In the spring, when the March thaw has unlocked the accumulated dirt of the winter, and the whole city is deep in mire, which are the streets that a Democratic contractor first throws himself upon? Does he first remove the festering mounds of pollution that block the poor man's path to his home, and make that home loathsome to him, and *then* betake himself to the coating of mud that soils the rich man's boots? Or does he leave reeking with abomination the crammed thoroughfares where Democratic voters live, half a hundred in a house, until every shovelful of dirt has been removed from the places where rich men reside, seven voters to a block? But why ask idle questions? It is the law of this world that the strong shall rule it. In a commercial city, the strong men are rich. Label your government what you will, it is the strong men in a community who have their way; and therefore, under all governments, the streets where rich men live are clean.

The plunder of the persons who are so unfortunate as to

serve the public, and of those who aspire to serve the public, is systematic, and nearly universal. Our inquiries into this branch of the subject lead us to conclude that there are very few salaries paid from the city or county treasury which do not yield an annual percentage to some one of the "head-centres" of corruption. The manner in which this kind of spoliation is sometimes effected may be gathered from a narrative which we received from the lips of one of the few learned and estimable men whom the system of electing judges by the people has left upon the bench in the city of New York. Four years ago, when the inflation of the currency had so enhanced the price of all commodities that there was, of necessity, a general increase of salaries, public and private, there was talk of raising the salaries of the fourteen judges, who were most absurdly underpaid even when a dollar in paper and a dollar in gold were the same thing. Some of the judges were severely pinched in attempting to make six thousand half-dollars do the work which six thousand whole ones had accomplished with difficulty; and none, perhaps, more severely than the excellent and hospitable judge whose experience we are about to relate. A person known by him to be in the confidence of leading men about the City Hall called upon him one day, and informed him that it was in contemplation to raise the salaries of all the judges \$ 2,000 per annum. The judge observed, that he was much relieved to hear it, for he had gone so deeply into the Sanitary Commission and other projects for promoting the war, and had made so many expensive journeys to Washington in furtherance of such projects, that he did not see how he could get through the year if the inflation continued. "Well, Judge," said the person, "if the judges are disposed to be reasonable, the thing can be done." "What do you mean by *reasonable*?" asked the judge. The reply was brief and to the point: "Twenty-five per cent of the increase for one year." The judge said no. If his salary could not be raised without that, he must rub on, as best he could, on his present income. The person was evidently much surprised, and said: "I am sorry you have such old-fashioned notions. Why, Judge, everybody does it here." Nothing more was heard of increasing the judges' salaries for a whole year, during which the inflation itself had become inflated, and every door-keeper and copyist had had his stipend increased. At length, the spoilers deemed it best, for purposes of their own, to consent that the salaries of the judges should be increased \$ 1,000; and, a year after that, the other \$ 1,000 was permitted to be added.

It was recently proved, in the presence of the Governor of

the State, that the appointment of the office of Corporation Attorney was sold to one incumbent for the round sum of \$10,000. This is bad enough, but worse remains to be told. Sworn testimony (from thirty-six witnesses), taken by a committee of investigation, establishes the appalling fact, that appointments to places in the public schools are systematically sold in some of the wards, — the wards where the public schools are almost the sole civilizing power, and where it is of unspeakable importance that the schools should be in the hands of the best men and women. One young lady, who had just buried her father and had a helpless mother to support, applied for a situation as teacher, and was told, as usual, that she must pay for it. She replied that she could not raise the sum demanded, the funeral expenses having exhausted the family store. She was then informed that she could pay "the tax" in instalments. Another poor girl came on the witness-stand on crutches, and testified that she had paid \$75 for a situation of \$300 a year. Another lady went to a member of the Ring, and told him, with tears, that she saw no way of procuring the sum required, nor even of saving it from the slender salary of the place. The man was moved by her anguish, took compassion upon her, and said he would remit *his share* of "the tax." It was shown, too, that the agent of all this foul iniquity was no other than the principal of one of the schools. It was he who received and paid over the money wrung from the terror and necessities of underpaid and overworked teachers. We learn from the report of the committee that the Ring in this ward was originally formed for the express purpose of giving the situations in a new and handsome school "to the highest bidder"; and, as the opening of the new school involved the discharge of a small number of teachers employed in the old schools, the Ring had both the fear and the ambition of the teachers to work upon. "There was a perfect reign of terror in the ward," says the report of the investigating committee. "The agent performed his duty with alacrity and with a heartlessness worthy of the employers. It appears that he not only summoned the teachers to come to him, but that he called on their parents and friends as to the amount they should pay for their appointments, — the sums varying from \$50 to \$600, according to the position sought."

And who were the Ring that perpetrated this infamy? They were a majority of the Trustees elected by the people, and the School Commissioner elected by the people, — six poor creatures, selected from the grog-shop and the wharf, and intrusted with the most sacred interest of a republic, the education of its children. It was known before that in some

of the wards the school trustees were drunkards ; it was known before that little children were piled up, like flower-pots in a greenhouse, in small, ill-ventilated rooms ; but no one supposed, before this investigation in 1864, that men could be elected to office who were capable of such revolting meanness as this.

When appointments are sold, appointments are likely to be numerous. Some of our readers, doubtless, have smiled at the ridiculous catalogue of offices created to relieve the pecuniary straits of Louis XIV., and given by Voltaire in his history of the reign of that expensive monarch. In Paris, in the year 1710, men holding the rank of counsellors of the king held such posts as hog-inspectors, inspectors of calves, of wigs, and of slaughter-houses, inventory-drawers, measurers of fire-wood, deputy measurers of fire-wood, pilers of fire-wood, unloaders of fire-wood, comptrollers of timber, markers of timber, charecoal-measurers, grain-sifters, comptrollers of poultry, barrel-gaugers, barrel-rollers, butter-testers, beer-testers, brandy-testers, linen-measurers, unloaders of hay, and removers of boarding. Not that counsellors to the king performed any of these labors. That was done by underlings ; the counsellors to the king merely pocketing the greater part of the fees. But how mild and trivial was their abuse of kingly power, compared with the hoards of superfluous officers that swarm in the public buildings of the city of New York ! In the office of the City Comptroller there are one hundred and thirty-one clerks. The Street Commissioner employs sixty. In the precious Manual described above, the reader, amazed at the interminable list of persons employed by the city, is every now and then puzzled by such items as these : twelve "manure-inspectors," at \$ 3 a day each ; twenty-two "health-wardens," twenty-two "assistant health-wardens," twenty-two "street-inspectors," all at \$ 3 a day each ; seven "assistant inspectors of meat," at \$ 900 per annum each ; seven "inspectors of encumbrances," at \$ 1,250 each ; twenty-two "distributors of corporation ordinances," at \$ 2 each per day. We have not space to continue the catalogue. Who has ever seen any of these wardens and inspectors ? A gentleman connected with the Citizens' Association, last year, had the public spirit to sally forth, Manual in hand, in quest of the twenty-two health-wardens and twenty-two assistants ; for neither he nor the writer of these lines, nor any of their acquaintances, had ever so much as heard of the existence of such officers. Long and painful was the search. He found that those guardians of the public health were bar-keepers, low ward politicians, nameless hangers-on of saloons, who absolutely performed no official duty whatever except to

draw the salary attached to their places. They were the merest creatures of the worthless man who appointed them,—the man who sold or gave away *blank interment-permits, signed*, to favored undertakers, “to save them the trouble of coming down town every time they had a funeral.”* For the benefit of those gentlemen of leisure in New York, who excuse their want of public spirit by saying that the city government is so corrupt that it is of “no use to try” to reform it, we will mention that, very much through the exertions of the warden-hunter referred to above, those three twenty-two’s were abolished a few months ago, as well as the entire department to which they belonged. To that single item of reform we owe it that the city was not desolated by the cholera during the past summer.

The reader has, perhaps, heard something lately respecting the cost of “opening” new streets in the city of New York. Under cover of those innocent-looking words, incredible sums of money are stolen from the owners of real estate. In the year 1811, the entire island, except a small strip at its northern extremity, was surveyed; the sites of all the future streets and avenues were settled, marked with stone pillars, and laid down on maps; so that, ever since that time, all land has been bought, sold, held, and improved with reference to the streets that were one day to run through it, by it, or near it. The work was so well done that those maps, and no others, are still used by assessors of taxes, and for all other official purposes. Copies of them are to be found for reference in one of the rooms of the building whereto all the world repairs every November to be taxed. Bearing these facts in mind, the reader will easily comprehend the audacity of the theft to which his attention is now directed.

A new street is ordered to be “opened,” and the judges of the Supreme Court appoint three commissioners to perform the work, at four dollars per day each. To “open” a street, in the legal sense, is not to go to work with shovel and pickaxe and convert a strip of meadow into a street, but merely to buy the strip from the owners, transfer the title to the Corporation, and then formally declare the street “opened.” Since the surveys are already done, and the maps already made, and since the expense of the whole transaction is borne by the owners of land upon the street, who bought that land *because* the street would one day exist, this legal opening is the merest

* This was the reason given by the undertakers when they were questioned on the subject by members of the new Board of Health. The possession of blank permits did not, however, prevent them from charging for the permits in their bills.

form. The commissioners buy the land required at the rate of one dollar for each lot taken, which is one among many proofs of the pure formality of the business. We will now state, first, what the three commissioners actually do who are so lucky as to have a street to open; and then we will show what is charged for the arduous work.

They meet in a room in the third story of a building in Nassau Street, which is from five to eight miles from the street about to be opened. They hire the room for the meetings of the commissioners. True, it is already occupied, and no change in it is made by the occupant; but they hire it, nevertheless. They appoint a surveyor, a clerk, an assistant clerk, and sometimes, we believe, a messenger. These appointments cost them three minutes of their valuable time; for there are people who have acquired, in some way, a claim to those appointments, and are appointed as a matter of course. There is not, there cannot be, a doubt that the "understanding" between the judges, the commissioners, the surveyors, and the clerks is complete before the first step is taken. The clerk is the ruling mind of the affair. It is he who lets the room; it is he who draws up the final report; it is he who divides the spoil, and takes, probably, the largest single share. He conceives, arranges, starts, and conducts the operation, and he does it at his ease in his own hired room. The officers being appointed, the commissioners have earned their four dollars each, and adjourn.

Every day, between the hours of twelve and two, they visit the apartment, inquire after the health of their clerk, perhaps take a cigar with him, see that their names are entered as having attended, which entitles them to four dollars, and then return, refreshed, to their private business. Meanwhile, sundry advertisements are published, announcing to parties interested what is going on. The surveyor may or may not take a car and ride up to the street, or walk over the part to be opened. Perhaps there is a house, built before 1811, which extends over the line of the street; and if so, the owner is entitled to compensation. Usually, however, there is nothing of the kind; and usually the surveyor, an old hand at the business, knows whether there is or not without going up to see. A draughtsman, meanwhile, has been copying a map of the street from the maps of 1811; and the clerk writes along the border of it (from the tax-books) the names of the owners of the lots on each side of the street. Sundry other advertisements are then published, calling upon parties interested to come and see what has been done, and state objections, if any there are. The clerk then draws up a report, and the thing is done. None

of these operations are hurried. Care is taken of the interests of the commissioners. It is not until they have paid their noontide respects to the clerk for a prodigious number of days that the street is pronounced "open."

Then the bill is presented. The surveyor charges as though he had made original surveys and drawn original maps. The clerk charges as though his report were the result of original searches and researches. The commissioners charge as though the opening had been the tardy fruit of actual negotiations. The rent of the room is charged as though it had been occupied wholly by the commissioners. And all of these charges are the very highest which any one, in his most lavish mood, could even think of in connection with the work supposed to be done. When we add, that half a dozen of these openings are frequently going on at the same time, in the same snug upper room, and conducted by the same individuals, the reader will not be surprised to learn that the net result of the business to the master spirit, for the year ending June, 1866, was \$25,466, of which sum \$4,433 was charged for the rent of the room, which he hires for about \$300 per annum, and \$950 was charged for "disbursements and postage-stamps." One surveyor's bill for the same year was \$54,000. It has been ascertained, after a laborious examination of the public records, that the total cost of "opening" twenty-five streets, or parts of streets, averaging less than half a mile each in length, was \$257,192.12. The public is indebted for this information to Mr. William H. Whitbeck, president of an association of property-owners recently formed to protect themselves against further spoliation of the same nature.

The Executive Council of the Citizens' Association has recently given publicity to a large number of facts relating to the same iniquity. We will select one of them:—

"In opening 124th Street, the Commissioners awarded to the owner of a house standing in the northwest angle of 124th Street and Second Avenue some \$4,500 for the damage to his building by the opening of the street. If this house had stood in the middle of the street, and had been entirely destroyed by the opening, he should not have received one cent, inasmuch as the house was built subsequent to 1811, when the map of the city was planned. The fact is, that, in 1811, a monument was planted at the intersection of 124th Street and second Avenue, and the person who built the house built it in the angle of the street, and facing the country road. The owner knew well where the street was to be, and *so avoided building upon it*. As the house was built facing the angle, the two ends of its rectangular piazza extended about six feet over the line, the one end over the line of Second Avenue, and the other end over the line of 124th Street. Now, if the owner built his

house encroaching upon the street, he should not have been paid for the damage caused by his own negligence. It appears, however, that the piazza has been rounded so as not to extend over the line, and for this rounding of the piazza, which could have been done at an expense of certainly not more than \$1,000, the owner has been allowed the enormous sum of \$4,500. The house stands there as good as it ever was. Need we say that the owner is a prominent politician?"

We have since conversed with the gentleman who was charged with the investigation of this case. He assures us that the rounding of the piazza cost, in reality, about \$250; and that he placed it at \$1,000 in his report, because, being ignorant of carpentry, he deemed it best to mention a sum much in excess of the probable cost.

Our lessening space warns us to forbear, though we have scarcely made an impression upon the mass of facts before us. We cannot dwell upon the favoritism practised toward the real constituents of the spoilers, — the liquor-dealers, — who actually paid a less sum per annum for licenses, and contributed a smaller amount to the Inebriate Asylum, than the liquor-dealers of Albany. We must pass by such enormous frauds as that known by the name of the Gansevoort swindle, in the course of which a tract of land was bought from the city at half its value, kept in costly litigation for several years, then bought back by the city for twice its value, and all the taxes remitted for the intervening period. Nor can we give details of the manner in which mean men steal from the price of the school-children's copy-books and slate-pencils, nor open up the enormous and complicated cheat which is covered by the word "stationery." How the hard-earned claims of poor laborers are "shaved," under pretence that there is no money to pay them in the treasury; by what means a clerk of a market enjoys an income as large as that of the President of the United States; how the funerals of eminent men, the celebration of national festivals, and the return of scarred veterans from the seat of war have been made the occasion, first, of drunken revelry, and afterwards of wholesale plunder; how the delicate wines provided for the sick in the public institutions are poured down the filthy gullets of many whose natural drink is distilled molasses; how the most valuable ferry leases, wharf privileges, and railroad charters are given away or sold for a tenth of their value to "dummies" who represent the very men who grant them; how many men hold two or more offices at once; and fifty other scandals into which we have looked, — we must pass by with this brief indication of their nature. It would be amusing to show the process by which

(until honest Christopher Pullman stopped it last spring) the city was made to pay \$87 every time the corporation granted permission to an old woman to keep a peanut-stand on a corner, for which she paid one dollar. As a portion of the "proceedings" of the two boards, the "resolution" had to be published in seventeen newspapers, and paid for in each, which cost the sum just mentioned. The same worthy gentleman has proved, by personal inquiry, that every rocket or firework discharged on the Fourth of July by order of the Corporation costs the city exactly twice as much as a private citizen pays for the same articles.

The result of all this plunder is, that in thirty-six years the rate of taxation in the city and county of New York has increased from two dollars and a half to forty dollars per inhabitant! In 1830, the city was governed for half a million dollars. In 1865, the entire government of the island, including assessments on private property for public improvements, cost more than forty millions of dollars. In 1830, the population of the city was a little more than two hundred thousand. It is now about one million. Thus, while the population of the county is five times greater than it was in 1830, the cost of governing it is sixteen times greater. And yet such is the value of the productive property owned by the city, — so numerous are the sources of revenue from that property, — that able men of business are of the deliberate opinion that a private company could govern, clean, sprinkle, and teach the city by contract, taking as compensation only the fair revenue to be derived from its property. Take one item as an illustration: under the old excise system, the liquor licenses yielded twelve thousand dollars per annum; under the new, they yield one million and a quarter. Take another: the Corporation own more than twenty miles of wharves and water-front, the revenue from which does not keep the wharves in repair; under a proper system, they would yield a million dollars above the cost of repairs.

We trust no reader of this periodical — not one — needs to be reminded that the money stolen by the thieves into whose hands the city has fallen is the smallest item of the mighty sum of evil resulting from the system. A person, however, must intimately know New York to realize what a welling fount of moral pollution it is. Those within the circle of corruption, and all with whom they continue to have dealings, lose at length all sense of honor and shame, all power to distinguish between right and wrong, and, finally, all knowledge that there *is* any difference between them. It is a most insidious thing. Many a good young man has been drawn into the

system so insensibly that he has become an habitual stealer of the public money, almost without knowing it. Others are conscious thieves, but not yet hardened beyond remorse. Some of these are, as it were, imprisoned in the system, and know not how to escape. A very large number are morally non-existent, and have no other thought or occupation except to devise and execute schemes of spoliation. And we do believe that *no* man who serves, sells to, or buys from the city, and no man who tries to serve, sell to, or buy from the city, does entirely escape contamination. What a tale we could tell of one notorious, but not naturally bad man, who, from a respectable though humble employment on the wharves, was lured into the low politics of his ward, and drank himself into such favor that he obtained, at length, the means of buying the privilege to steal as head of one of the departments, — and now, his place being abolished, and all his ill-gotten gains squandered in vice and ambitious schemes, slinks out of view, fatally diseased, and bereft of hope ! But this part of our subject we leave to our readers' own reflections, and we rejoice to know that it will fare better there than it could in these pages ; for, truly, the moral harm which this system is now doing in New York, and to the country through New York, is something which baffles and eludes written language.

The question now occurs, How was it that a city containing so many public-spirited and honorable men fell into the control of a gang of thieves ?

It has all come about in one generation. Within the memory of men still living, the affairs both of the city and the State of New York were so well managed that other States and cities were glad to copy their methods of doing public business. The time was when men, after a brilliant career in Congress, regarded it as promotion to be Mayor of the city ; when a seat in the city legislature was the coveted reward of a lifetime of honest dealing in private business ; when a seat in the State Legislature was the usual first step to the highest places in the national government ; when the very ward committees were composed of eminent merchants and lawyers ; and when even to serve as secretary to a ward committee was a feather in the cap of a bank-teller or head book-keeper in a great house of business. In other words, the time was when the city was governed by its natural chiefs, — the men who had a divine right to govern it. Nay, more : it was once a distinction to be a voter, — since none could vote who were not householders. None could vote who had not given their fellow-citizens *some* evidence of an ability to vote understandingly, and *some* indication of a disposition to vote correctly. The particular test

selected we do not admire; and all we can say in favor of it is that it was better than none. It did exclude the great mass of ignorance and vice; it did admit the great mass of intelligence and virtue; it did answer the purpose in a respectable degree.

This system was changed by the Constitutional Convention of 1821, which abolished the household restriction, and admitted to the polls all citizens, native and foreign, except convicted criminals and madmen. Among those who opposed this fatal change was Martin Van Buren; and all the dire consequences of it which he predicted have come upon the city. He said it would utterly corrupt the politics of New York, by giving it over into the hands of ten thousand ignorant or vicious men, whose votes could not be overcome. It would "drive from the polls all sober-minded people," from mere despair of effecting any good by voting. It would take away one powerful motive to virtue by abolishing the distinction between voters and non-voters. To be a voter, said Mr. Van Buren, is now "the proudest and most invaluable attribute of freemen." It was one of the rewards of industry and self-control. A proud day it was to a young mechanic, when he left his new home and his newly married wife, and walked, for the first time, to the polls to deposit his vote. It stamped him a respectable man. He was thenceforth a full-fledged citizen, one of the masters of the city, the rulers of which were his servants; and they knew it, and treated him accordingly. Mr. Van Buren's remonstrances were not heeded, and the old system was abolished.

The evil consequences did not immediately appear, because the habit of selecting respectable men for the public service survived the system which had created that habit. The reign of Andrew Jackson, which debauched the national government, developed rapidly all the tendencies to corruption latent in the government of the city. A lower grade of men were elected to office, and a grade still lower worked the machinery by which they were elected. Still, there was no *system* of stealing. A defalcation occasionally occurred: aldermen sometimes pocketed bundles of cigars from the "tea-room"; others contrived to convey their families to evening parties at the expense of the city; others may sometimes have cribbed an odd half-ream of paper or a box of pens; and, doubtless, there was some jobbery, and much favoritism, as there is in all governments. Honesty, however, continued to be the rule in the public service. We mean, that, although the politics of the city were debased, and the men elected were always depreciating, there was no thought among them of using their

places as conveniences for plundering their constituents. As late even as 1850 an alderman or chief of a department would have actually lost standing with his fellows if suspected of taking a bribe or of having a concealed interest in a contract. Yes, even in 1850, but sixteen years ago, it was a disgrace to steal the people's money on any pretext. If any one had then foretold that the time was at hand when the only men in the city government despised and snubbed by their equals would be the few who did *not* steal, no man could have believed the wild prediction.

About the year 1850, when it began to be perceived that omnibuses could no longer convey the morning and evening multitudes of people, and when street railroads in many avenues were projected, the Corporation conceived the fancy that they had the right to grant the privilege of laying rails in the public streets to private companies. In fact, it was taken for granted on all hands that this was their right; and it was in connection with those railroad grants that the corruption, on a great scale, began. It was then that the low, immature, ignorant, unprincipled, irresponsible, untaxed persons who formed the majority of the city legislature discovered that an alderman could, by a judicious use of his opportunities, not merely get a good deal of money, but make his fortune, during a single term of service. "Rings" were then first formed; "agents" were then first employed,—the mysterious go-betweens who have to be "seen" before anything can be done. The necessity for this machinery was soon perceived; for, at first, some sad mistakes occurred, which threatened for a time to spoil the game. One company, for example, distributed forty thousand dollars among the Aldermen, but were outbid, and the grant was given to another company. Naturally enough, they demanded their money back; but many of the poor creatures had already squandered their shares, and were totally unable to refund. One of the defrauded men, as it chanced, was a member of the grand jury, and he announced his determination to bring the matter before that body. Means were found to satisfy his claim; about one half the whole sum was given up, and the rest was paid in promises that have never been fulfilled. New-Yorkers remember the ancient, familiar firm of Kipp and Brown, formerly blazoned on the gorgeous sides of countless omnibuses. Mr. Solomon Kipp, the head of that firm, used to say that he personally expended fifty thousand dollars in "getting through" the two comparatively unimportant railroad grants in which he was interested. We have the affidavits of other parties before us, which justify the conclusion that, from this single

source, the Corporation corruptly gained a round million in about ten years.

Thus the system of spoliation began. Thus was the cupidity of the politicians inflamed. From that time to this, the ordinary New York politician has regarded public office in no other light than as a chance to steal without the risk of the penitentiary. It is not that the city government, so far as controlled by politicians, sometimes steals. We do not make that charge. We say it does nothing *but* steal; for even the most useful or necessary public work is sanctioned by it only so far as it affords promise of gain to politicians.

At the present time, as we are informed by one whose opportunities of knowledge are unequalled, all the political concerns of the city are controlled by about seven men, — heads of city departments and others. In most of the wards, a nomination to office by the party which is ludicrously styled Democratic insures an election by the people; and it is these seven men who work the machinery by which Democratic nominations are ground out. They are the power behind the ballot-box, greater than the ballot-box itself. Candidates for Congress, for the State Legislature, for the numerous boards of city legislators, must pass the ordeal of their inspection, and pay their price, before their names can go upon the "slate"; and such is the absoluteness of their power over ignorant voters, that they have caused to be elected to Congress by Irish votes a man who, as editor of a "Know-Nothing" newspaper, had been employed for seven years in vilifying Irishmen and their religion. They have taken up a man who commanded one of the companies of artillery that marched from the field of Bull Run because their "time was up," and, while the whole civilized world was pointing at him the finger of scorn, elected him to one of the most lucrative offices in the United States. Of late years, these lords of the town have had the deep cunning to give a few of their best appointments and several minor offices to Republicans, as part of their system of preventing investigation. This was a master stroke. Most of the publishers of newspapers were already bribed to silence by the Corporation advertising, and all the reporters were hired not to report anything disagreeable by the annual gift of two hundred dollars. This letting in of a few Republicans to share the spoils completed the system of repressing inquiry. They have known, too, how to turn to account the feud between two Republican leaders, which, after distracting the politics of the State of New York for many years, has transferred the battle-ground to Washington, and now threatens to snatch from the nation the fruits of its

victory over rebellion, or at least to postpone its enjoyment of them.

Such are some of the consequences that have resulted from admitting to the polls unqualified and untaxed men, in a city which catches and retains the worst of the foreign emigration, and where there are seven foreign-born voters to every five native. In New York, we actually see the state of things contemplated by Daniel Webster in his Pittsburg speech, when he asked, "Who would be safe in any community where political power is in the hands of the many, and property in the hands of the few?" Such an unnatural state of things, he added, could nowhere long exist. Political power in the city of New York is in the hands of seventy-seven thousand foreign voters and fifty-two thousand native voters; while the great bulk of the property of the city is owned by about fifteen thousand persons. Political power in New York simply means the power to steal with impunity the property of those fifteen thousand persons. This stealing does not take the form of open and indiscriminate spoliation, because it can be more conveniently done, and longer done, through the machinery of politics.

Having now stated as fully as our limits permit the condition of the government of the city, it remains for us to do what little we can towards pointing out the remedy. In considering this part of our subject, modesty and hesitation would become the wisest and ablest of men. It is no time to dogmatize and declaim, when the dearest interests of civilization are to be rescued from imminent and deadly peril. Next year, we trust, there will be a convention assembled to revise the Constitution of the State of New York, and upon the action of that body we hang all our hope of speedy and radical reform. If any one, therefore, has so much as a single well-weighed suggestion to offer toward a practicable plan, now is the time for him to offer it. On this great and most difficult problem every person in the State of New York who is so happy as to have a thinking head upon his shoulders should now habitually meditate and converse.

Patchwork will not answer. That has been tried, and found insufficient. While the ship is still on the ocean, it is well to stop the leak with anything that will even slightly diminish the risk of death. But the thing now in order is to go into dock, and overhaul the hull from keel to taffrail, or perhaps to abandon the vessel and build a new one. It is so exceedingly important for us all to understand this, that we will pause here a moment to mention a few of the expedients for checking thievery which have signally failed. *All* mere

expedients have failed, or are failing. Nothing will ever stop it but some system, the natural working of which will put into office a controlling number of honest men.

The total failure of the contract system is a case in point. To check jobbery and favoritism, it was enacted several years ago that all work done for the city, and all commodities supplied to the city, greater in value than \$600, should be the subject of contracts, to be awarded after due notice to the lowest bidder. The contract system, so far from putting an obstacle in the way of corruption, has furnished facilities for it. We have the sworn testimony before us, that it is common for fictitious bids to be sent in, for genuine ones to be bought off, and for parties who are best prepared to do the work required to be kept in ignorance of the proposals. Large iron contracts, for example, have been awarded before any one of the great iron firms have been aware that such contracts were in the market; and they have been awarded to men who never melted a pound of iron nor had any means whatever of doing the work. To a pork-butcher was assigned the contract for building a very costly bridge over a wide river; and the difficult work of grading an avenue, hilly and rocky, has been awarded to a politician ignorant of the most rudimental engineering. We have before us a successful bid for supplying the city offices with stationery, in which we find the bidder offering to supply "blue folio post" at *one cent* per ream; "magnum bonum pens," at one cent per gross; "lead pencils," at one cent per dozen; "English sealing-wax," at one cent per pound; and eighty-three other articles of stationery, at the uniform price of one cent for the usual parcel. This was the "lowest bid," and it was, of course, the one accepted. It appeared, however, when the bill was presented for payment, that the particular kind of paper styled "blue folio post" had never been called for, nor any considerable quantity of the other articles proposed to be supplied for one cent. No one, strange to say, had ever wanted "magnum bonum" pens at one cent a gross, but in all the offices the cry had been for "Perry's extra fine," at three dollars. Scarcely any one had used "envelopes letter-size" at one cent per hundred, but there had been countless calls for "envelopes note-size" at one cent each. Between the paper called "blue folio post," at one cent per ream, and the paper called "foolscap extra ruled," at five dollars and a half, the difference was too slight to be perceived; but every one had used the foolscap. Of what avail are contracts, when the officials who award them, and the other officials who pay the bill, are in league with the contractor to steal the public money?

To prevent one of the most common kinds of theft, it was enacted that every person who presented a bill to the city should take an oath before receiving his money, that he had not paid, and would not pay, any part of it to any one for getting him the work. This law is shamelessly evaded every day. A school commissioner orders work of a printer, telling him to be sure to charge a good round price. The work is done, the bill presented, the oath taken, the money paid. A few days after, that commissioner or his friend has some printing of his own to be done, which the printer does, and sends with the work a receipted bill. We can produce a printer who has upon his books \$10,000 worth of work done *gratis*, in recompense for services rendered in procuring him city jobs. When the procurer of the work has no occasion for printing, it is usual for him to *borrow* sums of money of the printer, which, like Dr. Johnson's sixpence, are "*not* to be repaid." Many of these petty politicians are, in fact, universal "dead-heads," and prey on all the town. One remark which we chanced to hear from one of them was exceedingly suggestive. "Pullman," said a young Councilman to our honest friend Christopher, "what did you want that Harlem Railroad grant rescinded for?" He alluded to the grant of the privilege to lay rails and run cattle trains through the handsomest street in the upper part of the island, in the teeth of the most vehement opposition on the part of the residents. "For my part," continued the virtuous youth, "there is no company I would sooner give my vote to than the Harlem. If I ask 'em to take on a hand or give a place to a friend, they're sure to do it. There's not a more obliging company in New York than the Harlem." The Harlem Railroad Company, reader, is Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt, one of the ablest men of business now living. The Councilman whose words we have quoted would not be employed by him in any post requiring average skill and honesty. And yet, behold the great, strong man courting the favor of the weak, little one! Do we blame either of these men? We arraign only the system which puts them in false and corrupting relations with each other and with their fellow-citizens.

It was lately enacted, that a three-fourths vote of both boards — the Aldermen and Councilmen — should be requisite to pass any bill granting or paying money. This was done because there was always a Democratic majority in both boards, and that majority was always corrupt. But it did not even retard the profuse voting of money. It merely required the Ring to buy up or bully a few more members, which was done in a week, and the work went on as bravely as before.

The present board of Councilmen began their term of service with thirteen Republicans and twelve Democrats, owing to special exertions on the part of reformers. Those thirteen Republicans were elected, at great expense, for the sole purpose of outvoting the thieves, and they were all solemnly pledged so to do. But the system repels men of strong and tried honesty, and consequently seven of the thirteen speedily fell into the toils. Some were purchased, others were intimidated, others were persuaded, but all yielded alike to the behests of the Ring. And, really, we cannot wonder at it. The six faithful members of the board are useless to their constituents. The most just, the most necessary measure proposed by *them*, is voted down as a matter of course. A young, inexperienced Councilman sees, on the one hand, the favor of his colleagues, the smiles of the City Hall, the freedom of the city's stores and shops, places for his friends, and \$7,000 a year; and, on the other, the frowns and surly opposition of his colleagues to everything he asks or proposes, a warfare against nefarious schemes which he knows to be useless, and which the public neither applaud nor hear of. For *his* brother, no easy clerkship is created; for *his* second-cousin's benefit, no great man discovers that he is in need of a fourth assistant messenger; and if a carman in *his* ward loses a horse through a hole in a wharf, and justly calls upon the neglectful city government to buy him another, it is enough for him to introduce the bill for it to be voted down. Can we wonder that so many immature persons yield to a temptation so insidious, and which addresses itself to so many of the weak places in human nature at once?

Another well-meant expedient has completely failed. Owing to the lavish expenditures, it invariably happens that many of the sums appropriated for specific objects are exhausted long before the end of the year. For example, in 1865, the comptroller estimated the cost of printing and stationery at \$145,000, and the Legislature of the State granted \$160,000. But the amount expended in that year was \$310,324. This excess would have presented difficulties to ordinary financiers, but none to those who control the finances of New York. Formerly, the deficit was supplied by "transferring" the money appropriated to other objects. "Transfer the wise it call." But this device having been forbidden by legislative enactment, parties interested sued the city for the amount of their claims; and, having obtained judgment against the unfortunate city, went through the form of seizing the portraits and furniture of the Governor's room in the City Hall. Then a judicial decision was obtained, which declared that judgments

against the city "must be paid"; and, sheltered by this decision, the city treasurer paid them. In the year 1864, the amount of the judgments paid from the public treasury was \$1,262,398. Last winter, a new expedient was devised to prevent this impudent evasion of a most proper and necessary law. It was enacted that no amount in excess of a specific appropriation should be recoverable by judgment. By what audacious trick this enactment will be set at naught has not yet appeared; but that it *will* be set at naught we have little doubt. If it is not, it will be only owing to the vigilance and tact of the public-spirited lawyers who are lending the aid of their talents to the Citizens' Association.

As these minor expedients have failed of their object, so, we believe, the grand expedient of all — the transfer of the control of the city government to the State Legislature — is not to be relied on for the future. That expedient, false in principle, was justified only by the urgent necessity of the case. To that temporary transfer of power from a completely corrupt to an incompletely corrupt organization, we owe it that the city of New York is still, in some degree, inhabitable. For ten years past, nothing has stood between the city and universal spoliation, except the Governor of the State and a small number of intelligent, incorruptible members of the Legislature. To them we owe the rescue of the police from the control of city politicians; and to the police, thus rendered efficient, we owe the deliverance of the city from rapine during the riots of 1863. For twenty-four hours, until adequate assistance arrived, they kept the mob in check by their discipline, courage, and rapidity. No one can tell what would have occurred, or what would not, if we had then had for policemen creatures appointed to serve the mean purposes of the mean men whose character we have been exhibiting, and who were in the fullest sympathy with brother savages torturing our prisoners captured in war. To the Legislature, also, we are indebted for a tolerable administration of the affairs of the Central Park, of the Health Board, and of some other departments now controlled by honest men appointed at Albany.

On the other hand, the interference of the Legislature has, at length, reduced the city government to a condition of political chaos. The Mayor has been deprived of all controlling power. The Board of Aldermen, seventeen in number, the Board of twenty-four Councilmen, the twelve Supervisors, the twenty-one members of the Board of Education, are so many independent legislative bodies, elected by the people. The police are governed by four Commissioners, appointed by the

Governor for eight years. The charitable and reformatory institutions of the city are in charge of four Commissioners whom the City Comptroller appoints for five years. The Commissioners of the Central Park, eight in number, are appointed by the Governor for five years. Four Commissioners, appointed by the Governor for eight years, manage the Fire Department. There are also five Commissioners of Pilots, two appointed by the Board of Underwriters and three by the Chamber of Commerce. The finances of the city are in charge of the Comptroller, whom the *people* elect for four years. The street department has at its head one Commissioner, who is appointed by the Mayor for four years. Three Commissioners, appointed by the Mayor, manage the Croton Aqueduct department. The law officer of the city, called the Corporation Counsel, is elected by the *people* for three years! Six Commissioners, appointed by the Governor for six years, attend to the emigration from foreign countries. To these has been recently added a Board of Health, the members of which are appointed by the Governor. Was there ever such a hodge-podge of a government before in the world? And nowhere is there any adequate provision for holding these several powers to their responsibility. Consequently, although the system of plunder has now been in operation for sixteen years, during which the public thieves have stolen not less than fifty millions of dollars, not one man of them has ever been punished, nor even made to disgorge.

There is a still more terrible objection to governing the city of New York at a city one hundred and sixty miles distant from it. The Legislature itself is corrupt. The same seven men who control the politics of the city nominate the city members of the Legislature; and these, reinforced by corrupt men from other cities, control one branch of the Legislature and are powerful in the other. Sometimes the city leaders cause themselves to be elected to the Legislature; but usually they select, from the clerks in the public offices, their own creatures, — mindless, dependent men, whose only virtue is a car-like fidelity to their masters. No language can overstate the hopeless incapacity of these men for the business of legislation. They can only vote as they are ordered; and if you wish to buy their votes, you must arrange the price, not with them, but their owners in New York. To elect such men to the Legislature is only to transfer power from the Legislature to the lobby. There at Albany we see, within the rails of the Assembly, a crowd of poor, ignorant, irresponsible clerks; and in the lobby we find men representing Cornelius Vanderbilt, the Central Railroad, the Erie Railroad, the Astor estate, and many other

men and companies controlling vast resources and carrying great prestige. Moreover, the agents representing these strong men and powerful organizations are persons of skill and audacity. When such a reversal of the natural order of things exists, and when the members of the Legislature are paid by the State a less sum per diem than their board costs, — to say nothing of drink and billiards, — what *must* be the result? We need not say.

A very able lobby agent, who has been in the business many years, has given us an inkling of the mode of procedure. "When we get to Albany," said he, "we make out our lists, and, after studying them and comparing notes, we *classify* members, and make an estimate of what it is going to cost to get our bills through. We find out about how much each man expects, and who is running him. Then we arrange the thing in New York with certain people, whose consent is necessary. The price for a vote ranges from fifty dollars to five hundred, unless it is that of the chairman of a committee. *He* wants more, because he has to appear on the record as originating the measure."

It was probably one of these originating gentlemen who could explain the testimony given recently in an Albany corruption case by a lady who proved herself a true helpmeet to her husband. She testified that a lobby agent called at her house one Sunday afternoon, when there was "some conversation" respecting the accused Senator, which the court "ruled out." She continued thus: "The next morning I put \$ 2,500 in greenbacks into a yellow envelope, and gave it to my only son, eleven years old. The boy got into the wagon with his father. *I never saw the money again.*"

If there is in this world a man who can be truly said to *know* anything, Mr. Thurlow Weed knows the Legislature of the State of New York. His testimony respecting the corruption in that Legislature, as given in the "Daily Times," a few months ago, is as follows: —

"Formerly the *suspicion* of corruption in a member would have put him 'into Coventry,' while *knowledge* of such an offence would have insured the expulsion of the offender. Now 'bribery and corruption' prevail to an extent greater than existed in the worst days of the Parliament of England, where, happily for England, the practice has been reformed, as it must be here, or corruption will undermine the government. No measure, however meritorious, escapes the attention of 'strikers.' Venal members openly solicit appointment on paying committees. In the better days of legislation, when no unlawful motive existed, it was considered *indelicate* in a member to indicate to the Speaker any preference about committees. The evil has been growing, each year being worse than the pre-

ceding, until reform is sternly demanded. Could the secret history of the present Legislature be exposed to the public gaze, popular indignation would be awakened to a degree heretofore unknown. In the Assembly everything was struck at. Not even a religious charity found exemption. The sources of rapacious corruption were the Assembly Railroad Committee, and the Committee on Cities and Villages. I say this upon reliable authority, to correct the 'Tribune' and the 'Times,' in both of which journals this Legislature is commended for its integrity. That there were honest and honorable members in both houses, by whose integrity and firmness much bad legislation was arrested, is true. The Senate, fortunately, presents an inflexible majority of upright members; while in the House, the Ring was formidable enough to put through whatever paid or promised to pay liberally, in defiance and derision of the efforts of an honest minority."

Mr. Weed says, that not even a religious charity found exemption. We can confirm that assertion. A committee of benevolent ladies went to Albany last winter, and asked the Legislature to give them \$ 20,000 in aid of an institution for the nurture and education of children who lost their fathers in the war. They said in their petition, that, after having been compelled to refuse admission to two hundred children of slain soldiers and sailors, who had no one left on earth to care for them, they had resolved to try and erect a larger building, for which purpose they proposed to raise \$ 20,000, and asked the Legislature to double the sum. Even this holy charity the shameless villains "struck at." An agent of the Ring called upon the ladies, and said, in the plainest English, "Pay me \$ 2,000, and you can have half the sum you petition for; pay me \$ 5,000, and you have the whole." The poor ladies, confronted for the first time in their lives with the extreme of human depravity, knew not what to think of this proposal, nor what to say to the man who made it. Anxious for their orphans, and far from their natural advisers, they were on the point of yielding, when the husband of one of them came to the rescue, and urged them not to taint their infant enterprise with the leprosy of corruption. They were reluctant to give up the aid so urgently needed, but they did do so at last. Later in the session, the Ring, finding that nothing could be got from them, allowed the honest minority to carry a bill giving them \$ 5,000. This narrative we received from the lips of the estimable and distinguished lady who headed the deputation.

It is such facts as these which convince us that the Legislature, as now elected, cannot be trusted for the future government of the city. The reform must be radical. It must begin at the bottom, with the voters, and work its way up. The

Citizens' Association — a body of eminent merchants, lawyers, and men of leisure, united for the sole object of reforming the government of the city — have proved, by most costly and laborious experiment, that the majority, long controlled by the plunderers, cannot be shaken from their devotion to them. By needless interference with the Sunday usages of the Germans, as well as by some wise and just restrictions upon the selling of liquor, the friends of reform have rendered the great grog-shop interest a unit for the corruptionists, and that interest can send to the polls twenty-five thousand votes. By very great exertions, an honest man can be chosen Mayor; for there is still in New York a small majority of the whole number of voters who will vote as they ought, if the issue is clear between honesty and corruption. But in the wards and districts inhabited chiefly by ignorant foreigners and vicious natives, the case is hopeless. Printed matter cannot reach them. They are untrained in the duties of citizenship. A prodigious number of them have some small interest in maintaining the system of plunder; for from the stolen millions flow numberless rills of lawless or excessive gain; so that the city is like an Italian farm irrigated by the dirty waters of a pestilential stream. They pay no tax. Since their share of the taxation is paid by them in the form of rent, it is the "extortionate landlord" whom they blame when their rent rises, in five years, from six dollars to twelve dollars a month, for two little rooms. They never think of going round to Councilman O'Rafferty's grog-shop, or Assemblyman Tooley's desk in the Comptroller's Office, or Supervisor McShaughnessy's market-stand, and berating *them* for cutting down their children's allowance of fresh meat and Christmas toys. It has been found impossible to make them see any connection between their pinching rents and the reckless votes of a man who has promised one of their relatives the place of seventh assistant door-keeper to the scavenger's office. The thing has been faithfully tried, and found *impossible*. What honest men print they cannot read, what honest men say they will not hear.

In view of the expected Constitutional Convention, we beg to offer for consideration the following suggestions.

No man should be deprived of the right of suffrage who now legally possesses it. The State must fulfil its compact to the end, cost what it may.

But no man, native or foreign, should henceforth be admitted to the suffrage who cannot read English composition of medium difficulty. More than that the State has no right to demand. Its right to exclude persons who cannot read arises from the fact that such persons are dependent upon others for

the information without which an intelligent vote cannot be cast. Such a rule, applied to the city of New York, would exclude not less than fifteen thousand votes; and this alone would give the city back to its legitimate owners, the virtuous and industrious portion of its inhabitants. This alone would do it!

No man should be allowed to vote at any city or State election who has not paid a direct tax; and that tax should vary with the whole amount to be raised. It would cost about twenty millions a year, for many years to come, to govern, tame, and teach Manhattan Island. Suppose the voters' tax were thirty cents per million dollars of the levy. Then, if the city were honestly governed, a workingman's tax would be \$6 a year. But if stealing should raise the levy to forty millions, it would be \$12. Now, the difference between \$6 and \$12 to a man who earns \$15 a week is such that he would be very likely to ask his representative what it meant, which is the very result to be desired.

The system of governing the city of New York at Albany should be abandoned as soon it can be safely done. If the city cannot govern itself, it must learn how to do it; and there is no way of learning how to do a thing except by doing it.

No officers should be elected by the people except the Mayor and the members of the city legislature. The people are puzzled and confounded on election days by long lists of candidates, whose names they never heard before. To ask the mass of voters to select a corporation counsel, a sheriff, a comptroller, a judge, is self-evident absurdity.

The distinction between the city of New York and the county of New York, with all its costly train of consequences, should be abolished.

Longer terms of service for Mayor, Aldermen, and Councilmen would, perhaps, be desirable. The appointments to all minor offices should be permanent. No creature should be intrusted with the unlimited power of removal. If the city would be well served, it must treat its servants so that men of honor and capacity will be found to serve it. A man of honor and capacity will not hold his livelihood at the mere mercy of another man.

There must be a decided increase of many salaries. Men capable of managing the finances of a great city, men fit to control any of the departments, cannot be induced to forego their chance of fortune in private business by salaries no greater than those paid to bank-tellers and book-keepers. A rich man of respectable talents *may* occasionally be induced to serve as

Secretary of the United States Treasury for a sum per annum less than modest housekeeping costs in Washington. It is insanity to pay him such a salary, it is true; but then the honor counts for something. In a commercial city, business is done on business principles; and if a \$20,000 man is wanted, \$20,000 must be paid for him. It is not just salaries that burden any people; it is stealing that does that. On the other hand, an officer who holds his office until proved to have misbehaved in it need not be paid the salary justly due to one whom a breath unmakes.

Somewhere in the system of city government there must be a power, a court, a something, independent and disinterested, before which an officer accused of misconduct or incapacity can be arraigned promptly and fairly tried.

It might be well that the Board of Aldermen should be composed of men who pay a tax upon \$5,000 worth of real or personal estate. With a taxed and restricted suffrage, this safeguard against profusion might not be necessary; but if the suffrage remains unrestricted and untaxed, some provision of this kind will have to be adopted.

These are some of the ideas which have occurred to us, and we offer them for consideration, with sincere deference to those who are versed in the art of governing. It is an arduous task which the people of New York have before them, and it will task both their wisdom and their patience to the uttermost. It will be difficult to dislodge the public thieves. It was difficult to take Richmond. But the taking of Richmond and the capture of the Rebel army were not more essential to the triumph of the United States over its enemies, than the reform of the government of New York is to the credit and spread of free institutions throughout the world. We have all heard of revivals of religion. Why may we not look for a great and glorious revival of public spirit? There are, indeed, indications that such a revival has begun. We hear of several instances of men of leisure who are awakening to the truth that there is a nobler way of using the gift of leisure than in looking out of a club window, or in collecting valueless rarities, or in printing exactly one hundred copies of antiquated trash upon "large paper." The existence of an organization so respectable and determined as the Citizens' Association is a sign of promise, and we hope to see its efforts seconded by other societies. Dr. Franklin mentions that, several months before the meeting of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, clubs and societies were formed for the purpose of exchanging opinions and gathering knowledge relating to the science of government. One of them met weekly at his own house,

when papers were read and discussed, and questions were proposed for consideration during the week. Why not have a dozen such in every ward this winter ready to co-operate with the Citizens' Association? The "Tribune," which has honorably distinguished itself by giving unrelenting publicity to schemes of spoliation, and the "Times," which has exposed much of the interior working of the system, and holds no parley with the thieves, — both, we are assured, are ready to lend their columns to the work of reform. Whatever any club may be able to expose or suggest, that is of the requisite brevity and importance, will find ready access to the public through those great journals.

We have been obliged in this article to limit ourselves to a single feature of the misgovernment of New York, — the stealing of the public money. There are departments of the system into which we shrink from casting a glance. To some of these corrupt men are entrusted the pauper, the sick, the criminal, the insane. It is their duty to guard the myriads of the virtuous poor against the rapacity which builds for them habitations that are unsafe and pestilential. Think what the government of such a city might be and do, what noble institutions it might found, what grand experiments undertake, what beautiful edifices construct, what merit employ and reward! The legislature of the city, composed of men eminent in business, in science, and in benevolence, — the men first in their several spheres, — would rank high among the great parliaments of the world, and contribute powerfully to its advancing civilization. The city of New York abounds in able and honest gentlemen, in every sphere of life. On just conditions, they can be won to the public service. Why can we not have them?

And let no one suppose that this is a subject which concerns the people of New York only. It concerns us all. Not only has every American citizen an interest in the welfare and honor of his country's chief city, but the evils under which New York suffers exist, to some degree, in many other towns, and threaten *all* of them. New York, as we have said, is a sieve which lets through the best of the emigration that comes to our shores, but catches and retains the worst; and therefore it is in that city that the system of unqualified suffrage has been *first* put to a test under which it has broken down completely and hopelessly. But in all our large cities there is of necessity an assemblage of ignorant, irresponsible, and thoughtless men, totally incapable of performing the duties of citizenship. We accordingly find in Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Boston, New Orleans, San Francisco, Chicago, Albany, Roches-

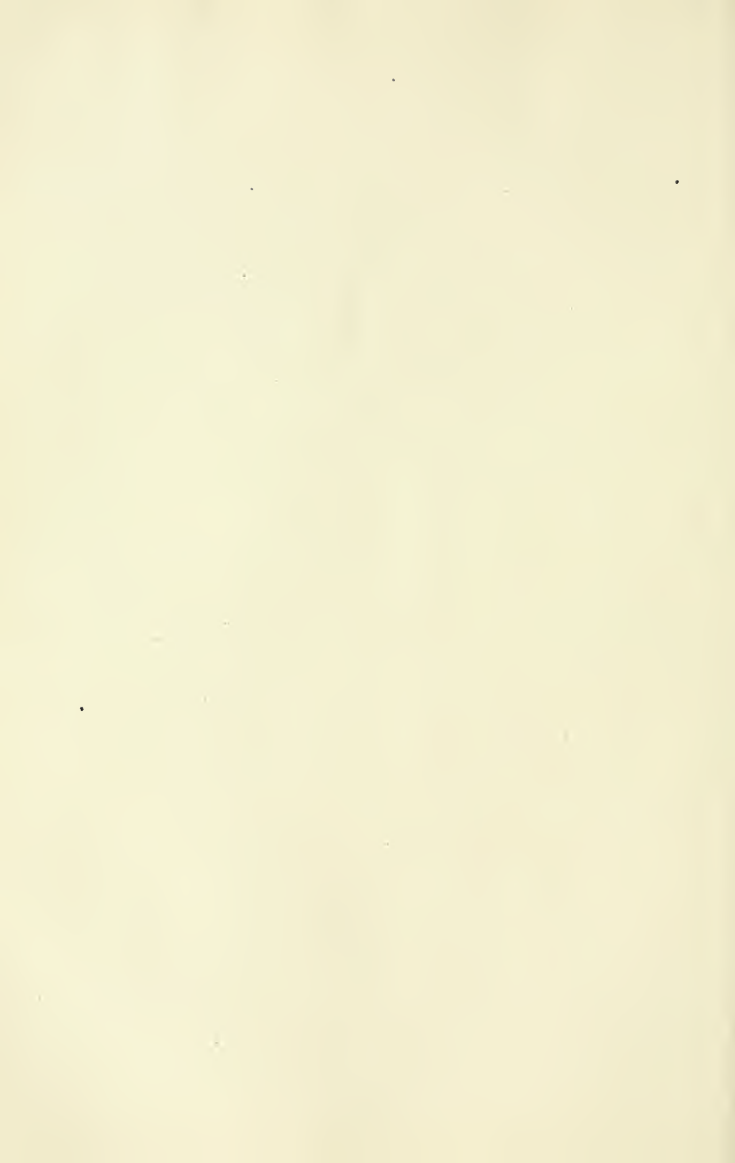
ter, Buffalo, St. Louis, and many other cities, the insidious beginnings of that misgovernment which has made New York the by-word and despair of the nation.* New York, too, is suffering vicariously for her sister cities. As it has been her destiny to suffer most from the evils of ignorant and untaxed suffrage, so it is her duty to wrestle first with those evils, and apply a remedy which shall be radical, final, and universally imitable. She will perform that duty. She is performing it. No city of equal size on earth contains so great a mass of public spirit and administrative capacity, and we feel persuaded that the time is near at hand when those great qualities will be successfully exerted in rescuing the metropolis from the hands of the spoilers who have stolen into possession of it.

It looks now as though one half of civilized mankind were going henceforth to live in towns; and it appears to us that in the laying out, the decoration, and government of towns America has shown a particular talent. How full of all pleasantness are the villages of New England, with their gardens and lawns, their tidy fences and spotless houses, their ample streets, and their mighty elms waving over all. What other land can show towns so vigorous and handsome as Nashville, Cleveland, Detroit, Buffalo, Rochester, and fifty others that will occur to the reader? What a spirited thing it was in

* During the prevalence of the cholera last summer, an appalling glimpse was given the public of the interior of a jail in the city of Brooklyn. An eyewitness wrote: "The cholera there resulted from over-crowding the cells. The ventilation is bad, the air offensive, the food, pork, beans, bread and molasses; and when the late intensely hot and debilitating weather is taken into account, it should be a matter of wonder that every one was not stricken down. The criminal courts adjourned from June until October, and to my knowledge there are many there too poor and friendless to get bail, that will be able to prove their entire innocence when put on trial. To keep these persons in over-crowded cells with broken-down drunkards, whose systems were fitted by long habit for disease, would be little better than murder. . . . A panic existed that no imagination can conceive. Terror was in every face. In one cell, an Englishman in collapse, rising up and falling down convulsively, his cell-mates running round almost distracted; in another, a corpse about to be removed. Two little boys, waiting to go to the House of Refuge, were screaming at the top of their voices from fear; a drunken man singing a maudlin song in a corridor; men in the halls, with their faces to the gratings, trying to breathe fresh air, for fear of inhaling contagion. Several others, with symptoms of approaching cholera, were expecting death. If all the prisoners could be kept in the jail until they dropped off one by one, there might be some sense in it, apart from its inhumanity. But the jail supplies the almshouse, the penitentiary, the workhouse, and, in many instances, the lunatic asylum, with inmates. Prisoners are first usually taken there before being sent to those institutions."

Vermont to commission young Larkin Mead to adorn her Capitol with a statue of Ethan Allen; and in Cleveland, to commemorate Perry's victory by one of the finest out-of-door monuments in the world; and in Tennessee, to crown the heights of Nashville with a State-House of unequalled elegance and solidity; and in marvellous Chicago, three times to raise the entire city for the sake of better drainage, and to bore far out under Lake Michigan for pure water! How good it was in great Boston to put it within the reach of all her boys and girls to learn how to swim, and of all her men and women to practice the art! This was one of those fine details of civilization which are only reached after the great essentials have been realized and become habitual. New York, too, might boast, even amid her blushes. The Central Park was a noble gift to posterity; the Croton Aqueduct was a truly Roman thought; and all the islands, — are they not covered with public institutions, nobly planned? We can truly say, that the people of the United States have shown an aptitude for orderly and elegant arrangement. They know how to make their towns and cities fit abodes for civilized beings, and they mean to make them such.

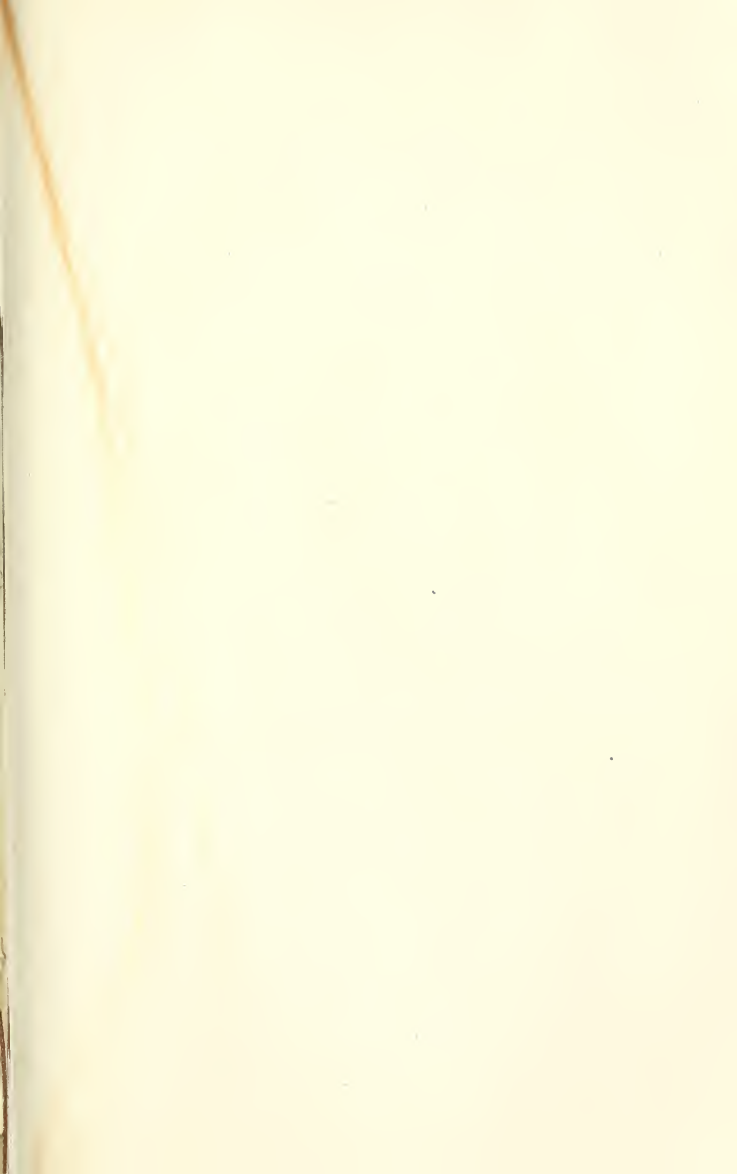
But the spoiler must be expelled, or he will spoil all. Honest men possess all the true, trustworthy intelligence there is in the world. Villains of talent there may be, but no wise villain, still less a villain of public spirit. The thieves must be driven out, if it costs a bloody war; and it *will* cost a bloody war if they are not.







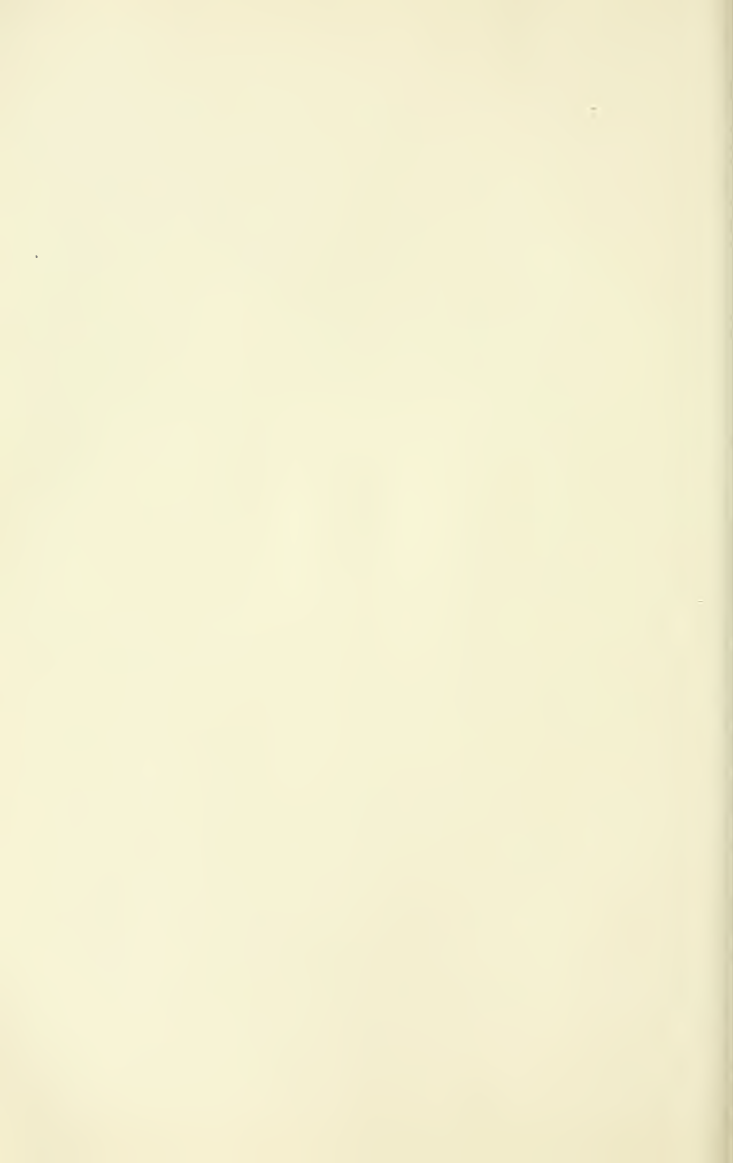


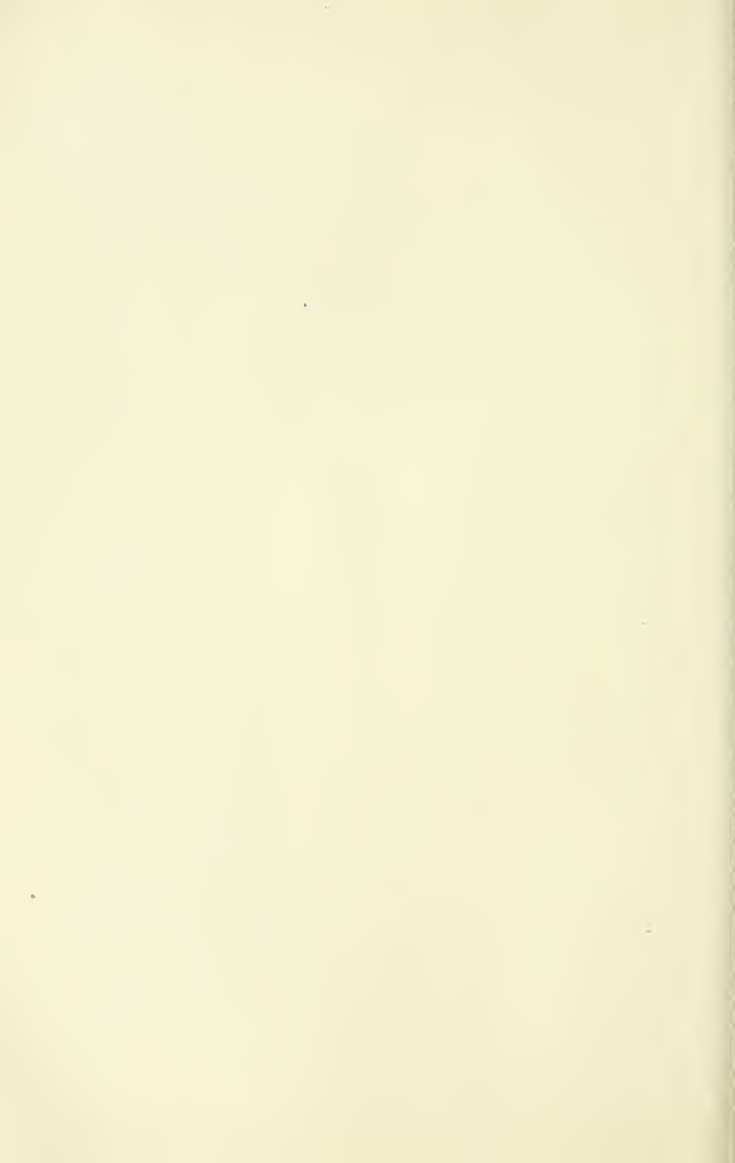




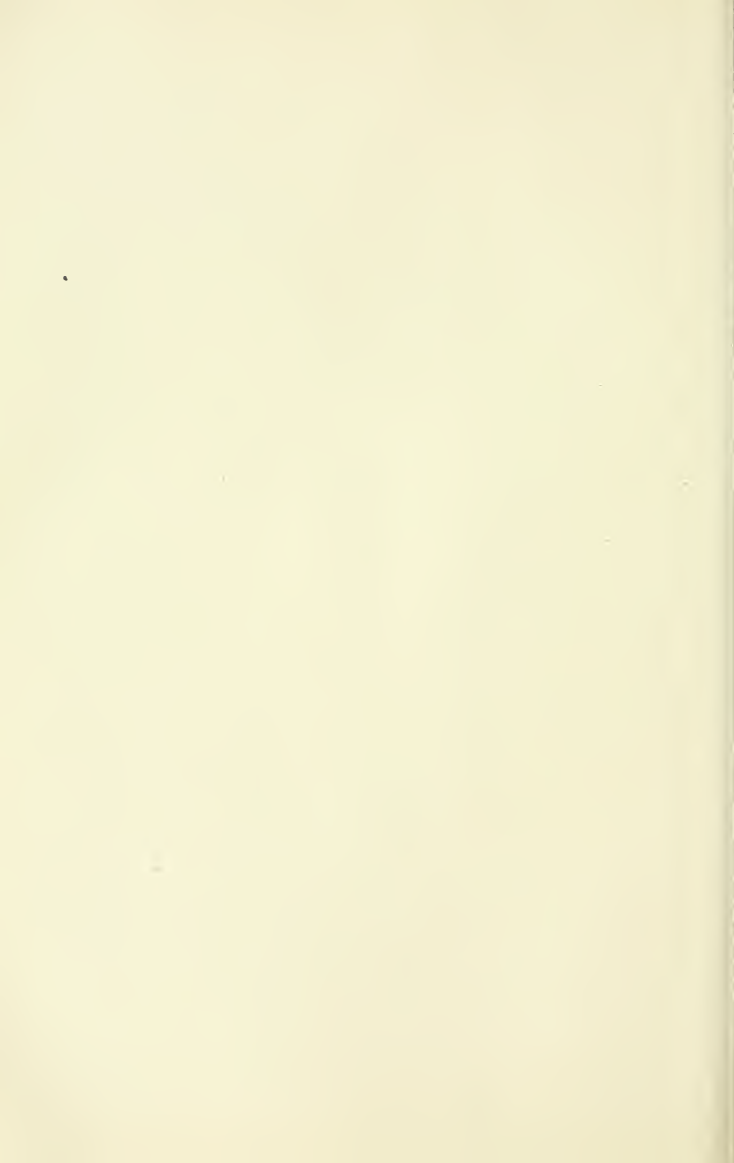




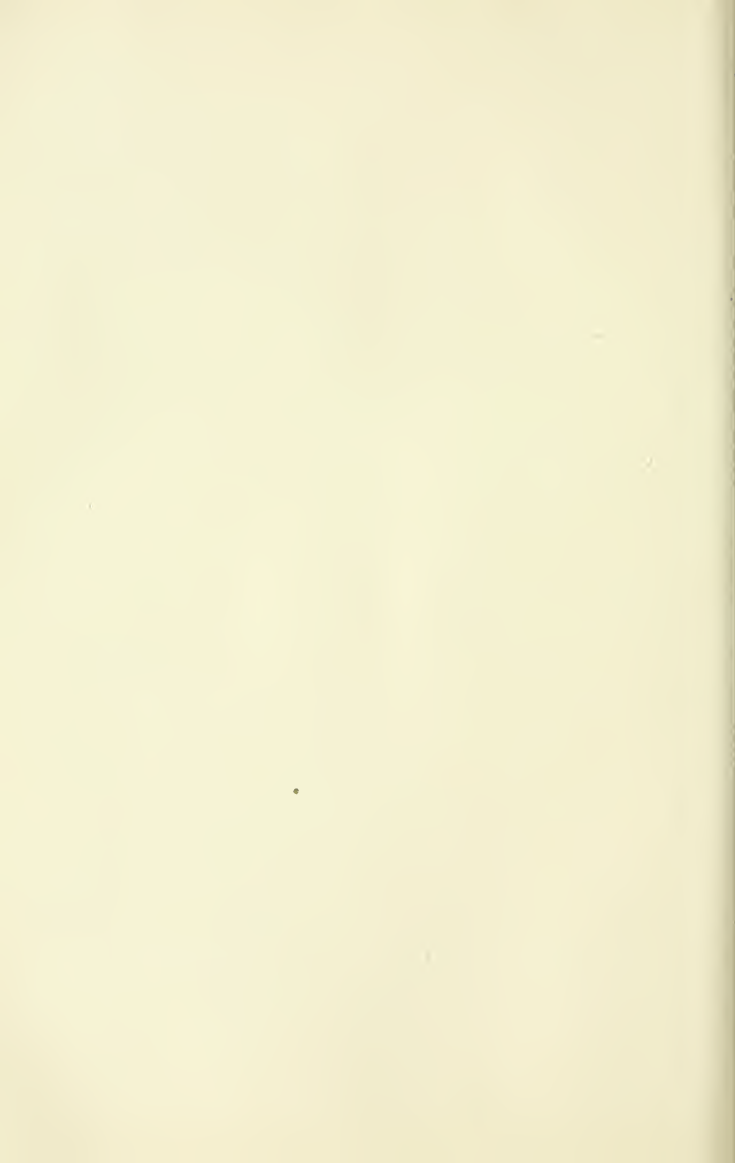




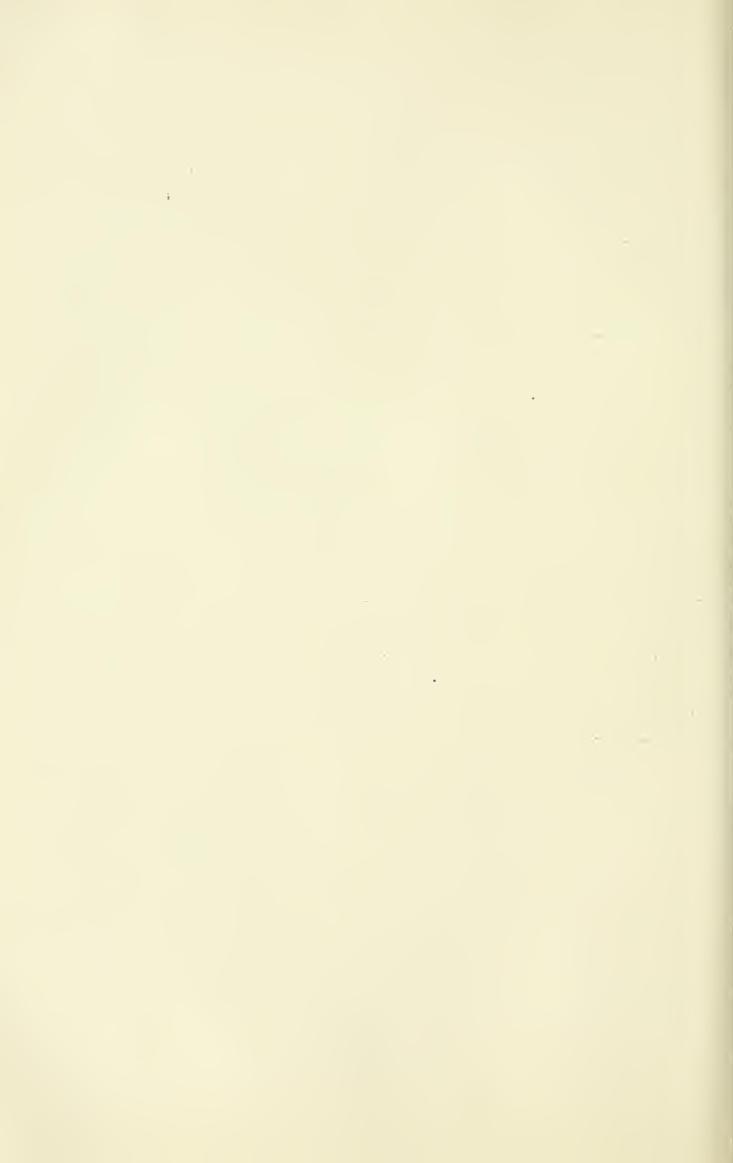


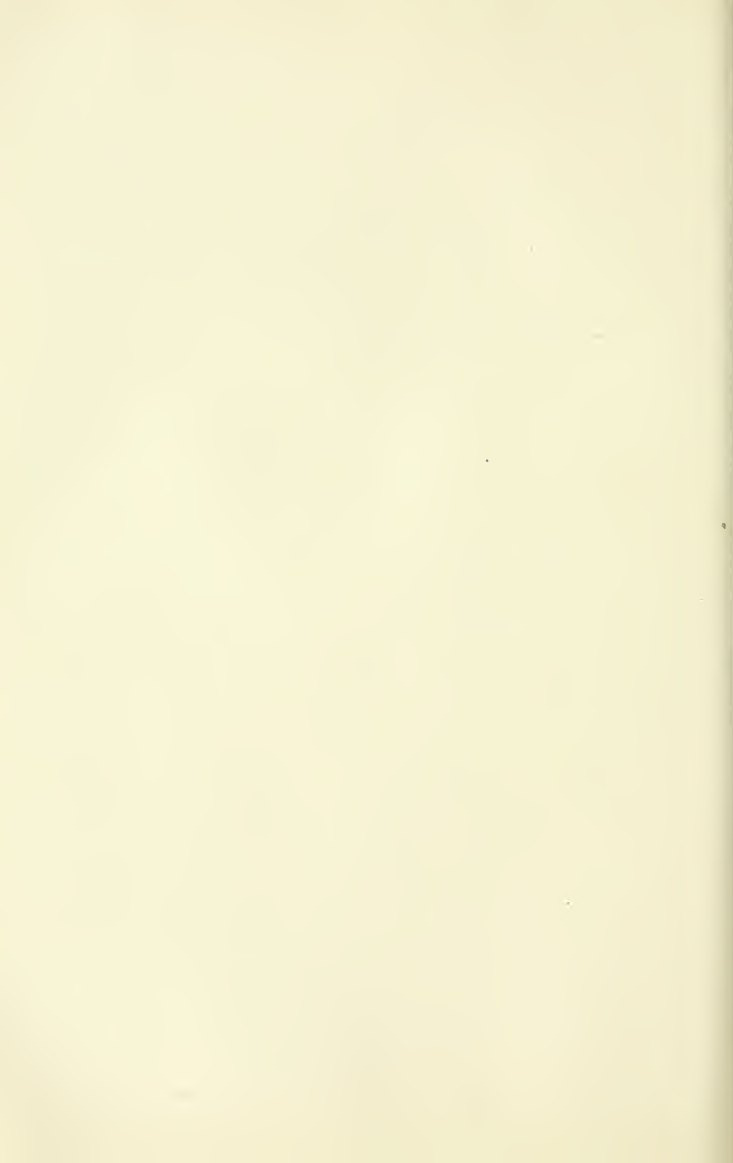


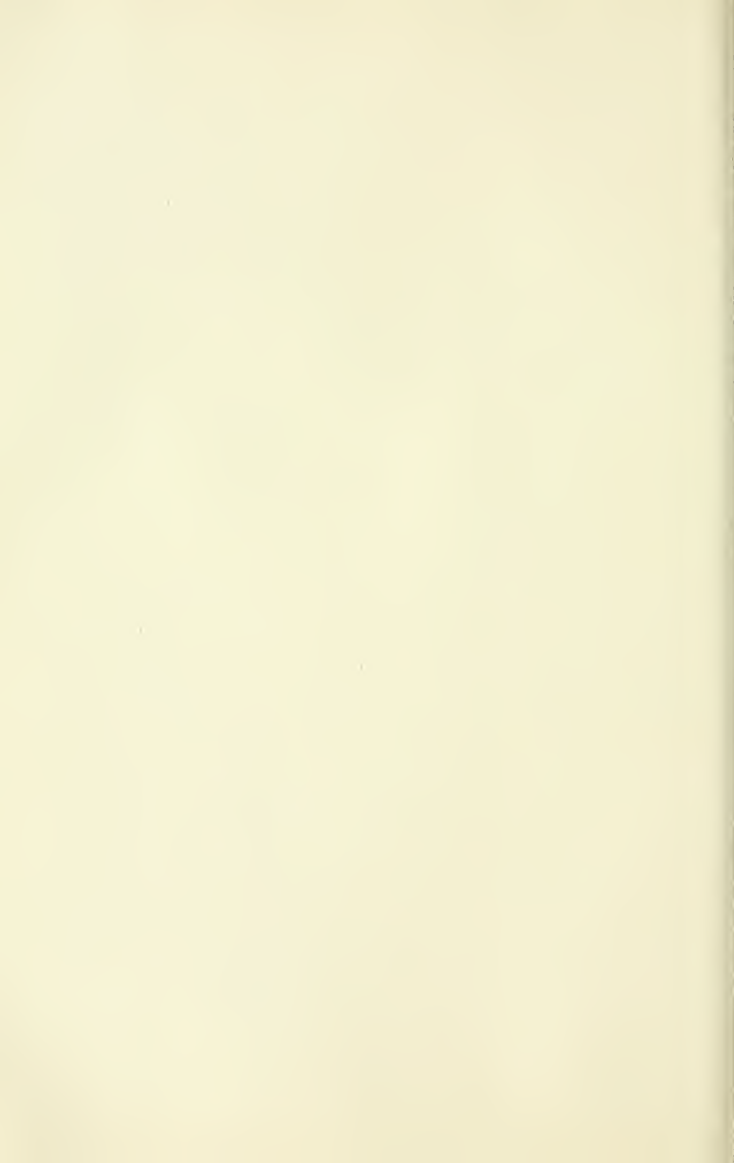




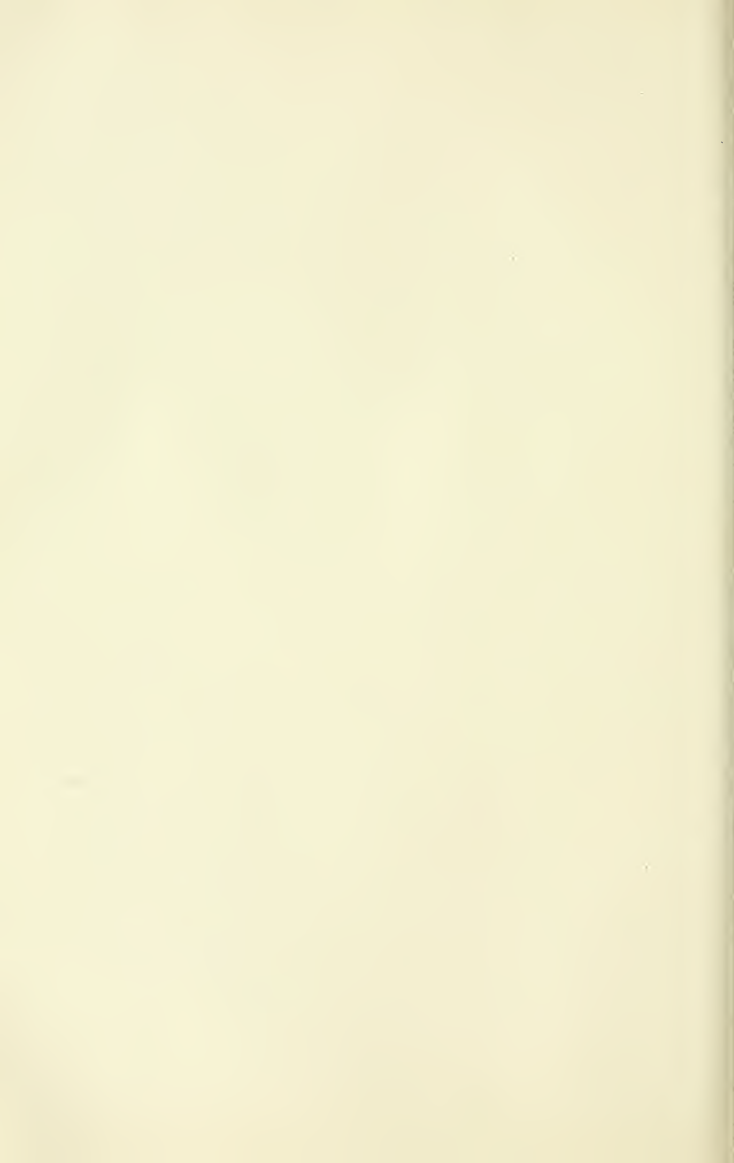




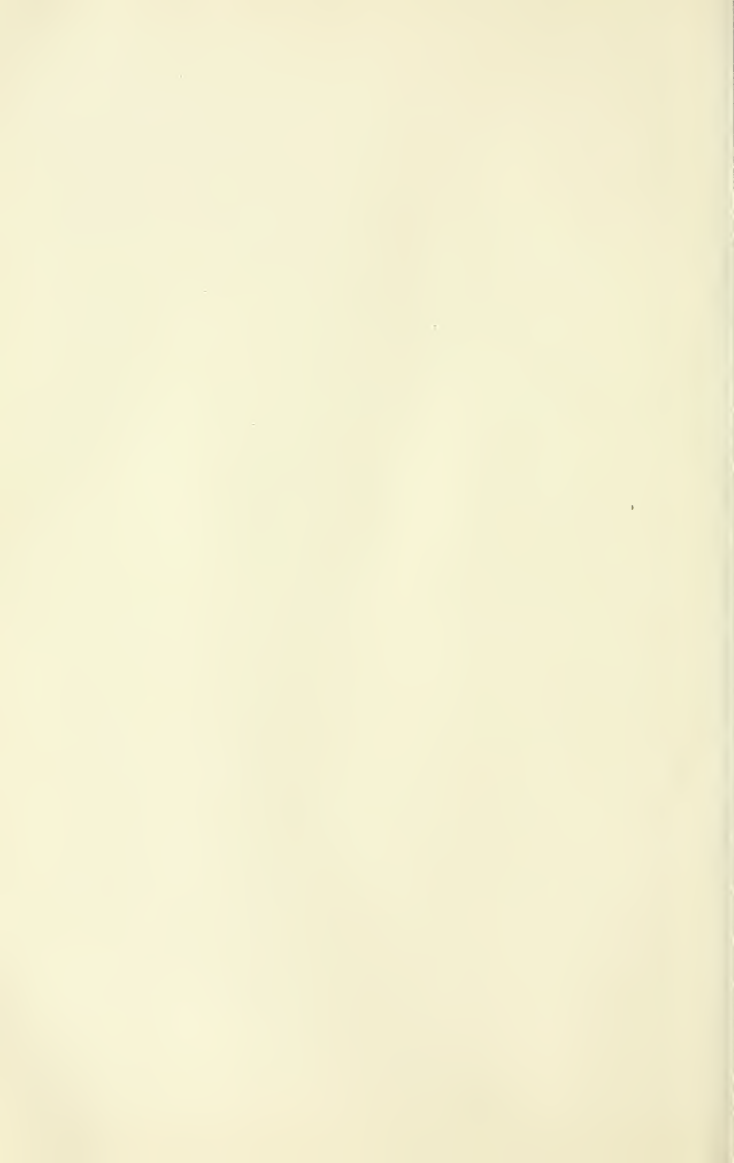




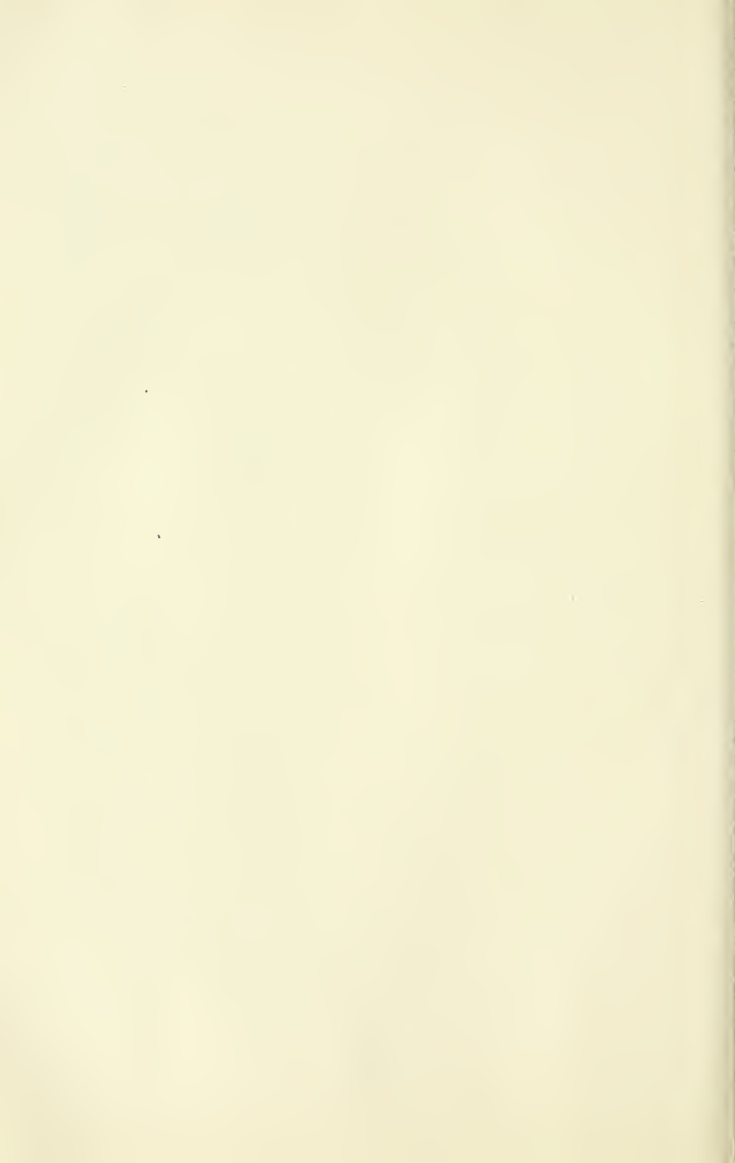


















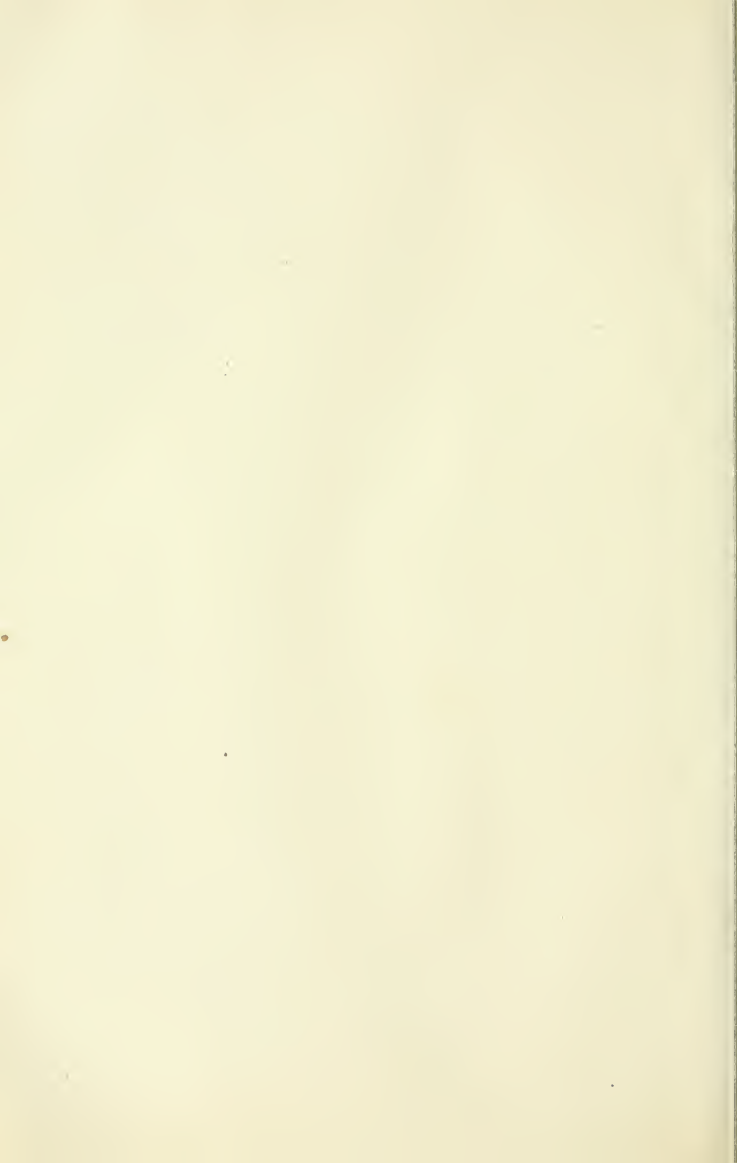




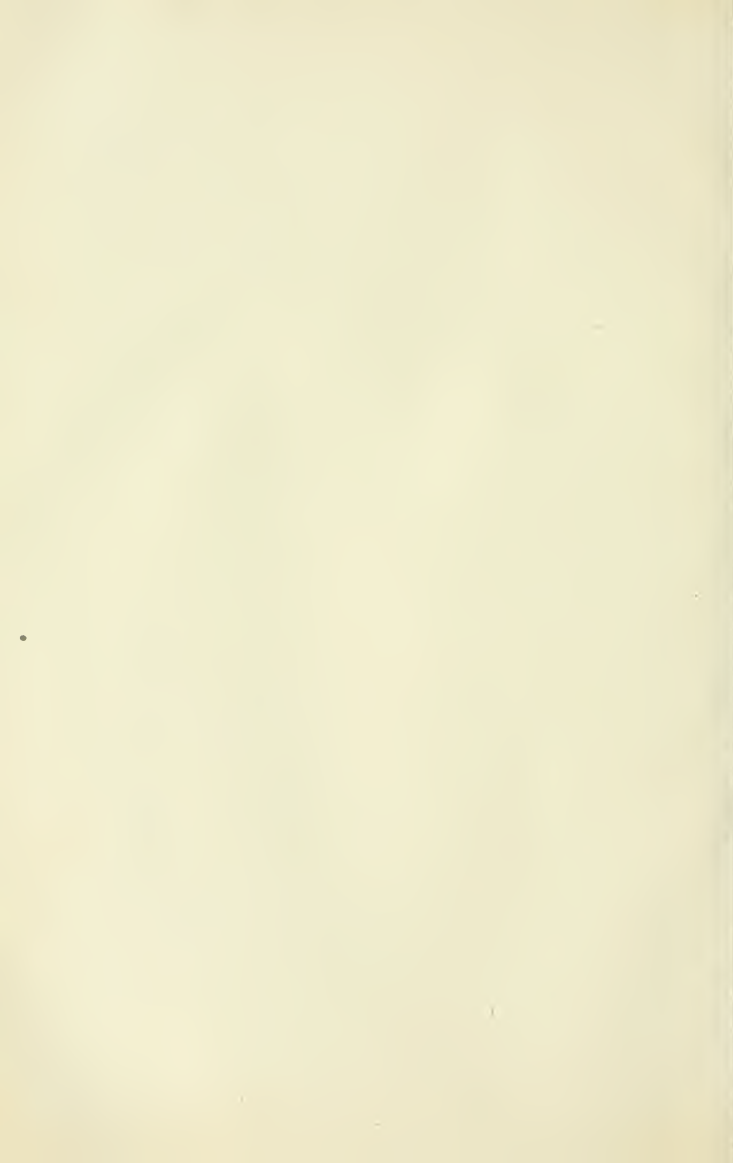








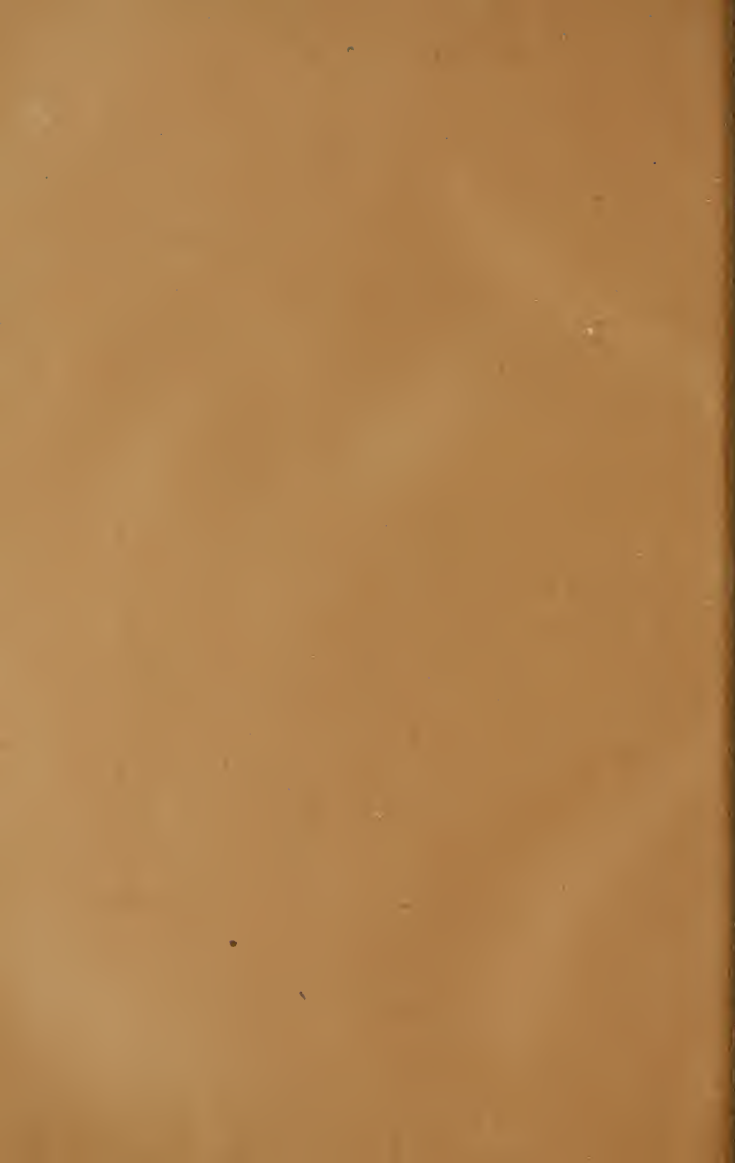














LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 221 649 8